

# **University of Alberta**

## **A Narrative Inquiry into the Lived Curriculum of Grade 1 Children Identified as Struggling Readers: Experiences of Children, Parents, and Teachers**

by

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## **Dedication**

For my husband and our children

Randy, Maxime, Sasha and Alexie Lutz

and my parents

Charlotte and Jean-Guy Houle

## Abstract

My daughter's experiences as a struggling reader awakened me to difficulties children live when they do not learn as expected in schools; she inspired this study. My research puzzle focused on the experiences of children identified as struggling readers in Grade 1 and on those of their parents and teachers who lived alongside them. This narrative inquiry explored how children, parents, and teachers experienced living in the midst of tensions created between the lived curriculum of a struggling reader and expectations of the mandated curriculum.

This study is situated in the literature of curriculum studies, in the concepts of lived curriculum and curriculum making. Two boys identified as struggling readers by their Grade 1 teacher participated in the study along with their parents and their Grade 1 and Grade 2 teachers. I spent a total of seven months as a participant observer in the boys' Grade 1 and Grade 2 classrooms. I had one-on-one conversations with the children, their parents, and their teachers to learn about their experiences. My field texts included field notes of my observations in the two classrooms, transcripts of one-on-one conversations with each participant, artefacts of the children's classroom work and drawings, school documents, and a research journal. I wrote two narrative accounts of each child (one per grade) intertwined with their parents' and teachers' stories.

Looking across the narrative accounts, I inquired into silences on school and home landscapes. Children, parents, and teachers kept silent some of their stories of experiences as they moved between landscapes. I examined these silences through the lens of sacred, secret, and cover stories. Additionally, I inquired into one family's

familial curriculum making around home reading, highlighting a mother's knowledge of the four curriculum commonplaces (teacher, learner, milieu, subject matter).

The relational ethics and multiple perspectives of this study provided information on children's, parents', and teachers' experiences in school and at home that might otherwise have remained untold. Attending to relationships, tensions, and silences in school curriculum making and recognizing familial curriculum making in children's lives helped me imagine forward looking stories as a teacher, a teacher educator, and an educational researcher.

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## Chapter One: Stories of School

### Early Story<sup>1</sup> of School

My father is the only child in his family of 13 to have completed postsecondary education. His family was humble and did not have the means to support higher educational pursuits. When my father's siblings were old enough to work, they left school and found jobs to help support the family. Because my father was strong academically, the priest who came around country schools to recruit potential future priests chose him. He was fortunate to receive his *classical*<sup>2</sup> education from the Brothers and Fathers at the seminary.

My father chose not to become a priest. Rather, he used his education to become a teacher. He has always had a great respect for education and for schools. When I grew up, school was sacred and was not to be missed without a very good reason or to be questioned. I knew we were never allowed to complain about our teachers. We had to be respectful toward them at all time. My mother felt the same way about schools even though she did not have a formal education like my father. My mother's family had the means to support the children's education, but in her family, only men went to university. While my mother's brothers went on to become professionals, it was never an option for my mother or for her sister to pursue their education. It was often understood in those days that women did not need a higher education since they would marry and stay home

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term story as a narrative term. People's lived experiences are expressed in a storied form through stories. "[H]umans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2).

<sup>2</sup> A *classical* education, called *Cours classique* in French Canada, was an education that prepared students for university or priesthood. Languages (French, Greek, Latin), grammar, rhetoric, literature, philosophy, mathematics, and science were taught over the eight-year program.

to care for a family. To my knowledge, my mother never discussed the fact that she was not offered the choice to pursue her education and always seemed happy to be a *stay at home* mother. One of her tasks as our mother was to support us in doing our schoolwork. She had high expectations for us; we had to work hard and get good grades. My mother valued education as much as my father did. I have memories of her telling us how she was good in language arts. I knew she enjoyed that subject matter in school. That was a way for her to share with us a positive experience of her school days and, at the same time, emphasize that school was good for us. Her love and interest for the language arts have been carried over in a precious collection of dictionaries that she regularly refers to whenever she wonders about the spelling of a word or its meaning, in French or in English. I vividly remember her looking up words as I grew up. Even though she has no formal education, my mother has always been interested in learning. Even now, in her 70s, she still takes courses about varied topics and surfs the Internet in search of new learning experiences.

My father worked as an English teacher with Francophone children. Two nights a week, he also taught English to adults using the method<sup>3</sup> my maternal grandfather had developed to teach English to French speaking adults. My mother's father was also an English teacher. Growing up with a father and a grandfather who valued English makes me wonder about the influence this had on my move to Alberta, an English language province, where I started my teaching career. Growing up in Québec in the late '60s to the mid '80s was a politically charged experience. Language was a big issue; French was our language, our culture, and it was important. We were strongly attached to our native

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<sup>3</sup> Bouchard, J.E. (1982). *L'anglais expliqué et enseigné en français*.

language even though we lived in a predominantly English Canada. Our language helped define who we were. Even though my parents were *proud* to be Québécois, unlike some *nationalist*<sup>4</sup> compatriots, they never rejected the English language, a language that in the eyes of some posed a threat to our native origins. How could they? It was my father's means to support his family, just as it had been for my grandfather. Furthermore, my parents and my grandparents had a sense of admiration toward the ability to speak the language of the Canadian majority. "Speaking English is an advantage; it gives more opportunities in life, and opens up the world", I would hear growing up. As a teenager, I took English instruction at school and I attended my father's weekly evening English classes with my brothers. We had to take these classes seriously. I still clearly recall studying sessions with my mother during which she quizzed me on the previous week's lesson. Education, including learning English, was highly valued in my family.

### **Beginning Teacher's Story of School**

The scarcity of available teaching jobs in Québec in the late eighties motivated me to move to Alberta in 1986. My immersion in an English environment was extremely challenging. Not being able to understand and speak as freely as I could in French was frustrating and exhausting. With time and support from friends and colleagues, living in my new environment became less of a struggle as I was learning to use the English language. Learning to teach represented another challenge. I was fortunate to have a principal who was supportive of me. He encouraged me to reflect on my practice and to have clearly defined purposes when choosing activities in the classroom. Down the hall

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<sup>4</sup> In my experience, nationalists were often perceived to be separatists who wanted the province of Québec to be independent from Canada and who were uncomfortable with the use of the English language in Québec because of its historical influence.

from me was Bonnie<sup>5</sup>, an exchange teacher<sup>6</sup> visiting from Scotland, with whom I became close friends. She was a mentor to me; we had countless discussions about education, learning, and teaching. She shared with me her holistic approach about education. Her influence and that of my principal's helped shape the teacher I am now. I often think about them and reflect on what I learned from them.

As a new teacher, I believed schools were good for children, just as I had learned growing up in my family. Reflecting on my beginning years, I can recall a certain number of experiences that have been significant to me. One of them was meeting Lee<sup>7</sup> and his mother. Lee<sup>8</sup> was a boy in my Grade 1 class who could not read<sup>9</sup>. I still have a vivid image of him in my mind. I remember his worried eyes. He seemed confused about what was happening to him. He knew he could not read in French like most of his classmates. His mother was a parent volunteer who came once or twice a week to listen to children read to her. I sensed, too, in her eyes that she worried about her son who was not learning to read. I wondered what to do to help Lee and his mother. My colleague Bonnie explained to me how she worked with students who were not reading yet. Even though she recognized that they were not yet reading, she explained that it is common for some students to learn to read later than others do in Grade 1, since children are at various stages in their development. Her way of thinking resonated with me. I had been

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<sup>5</sup> Bonnie is a pseudonym.

<sup>6</sup> An exchange teacher is a teacher who comes from a different country and trades position with a Canadian teacher for the duration of one school year.

<sup>7</sup> Lee is a pseudonym.

<sup>8</sup> Lee was registered in the French Immersion program. I taught all school subjects in French to students who were learning French as a second language.

<sup>9</sup> Some readers might wonder about the challenges of learning to read in a second language. Although I recognize that trying to learn to read in a second language might add a layer of complexity to the process, there are students who do not learn to read in Grade 1 in their first language. I chose not to discuss the second language issue as my study is not about second language learning but about the experiences children have when they struggle to learn to read in Grade 1.

wondering about using, or not using, the basal readers that I found in my classroom. I noticed some children seemed disinterested in reading them. I wondered if the more challenged readers shied away from reading these books because they found them overwhelming. I was not sure how to use the other resources in my classroom. Bonnie encouraged me to view differences in learning pace and style as part of human nature. She encouraged me to offer children learning activities that matched their individual characteristics and to use different types and levels of books. As the school year was unfolding, I was developing an appreciation for learning activities, and for resources. I noticed how limited some activities I was giving my students were for some of them, considering each person's learning style and interests. I was learning that there is no simple blue print to teaching and learning. Looking back at those years, I realize that I have been trying to find pieces to my teaching puzzle for a long time.

Memories of Lee and his mother resurface periodically. I realize now that I saw them like we look at snap shots, that I only saw bits and pieces of their experiences. Even though I often wondered about teaching methods, approaches, activities, resources, and the well-being of my students, I do not recall being concerned about what would happen to them in Grade 2. The snap shots I saw of my students and their parents ended in June of first grade. It did not cross my mind to consider how those parents lived the Grade 2 experience until I became a parent and added a new perspective to my teacher knowledge<sup>10</sup>. Having my own children made me see how interwoven school stories are

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<sup>10</sup> *Teacher knowledge* refers to Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) notion of *personal practical knowledge*: a term designed to capture the idea of experience in a way that allows us to talk about teachers as knowledgeable and knowing persons. . . . [It] is in the teacher's past experience, in the teacher's present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions. Personal practical knowledge is found in the teacher's practice. It is, for any teacher, a



with students' home lives, and the impact these stories have on families.

## **Parent's Story of School**

I became a mother in 1992, six years after I started to teach. I now have three children, a son and two daughters. Two of my children had no trouble learning to read in Grade 1. School seemed to be an appropriate place for both of them. Their report cards showed good grades, they were learning the basics and seemed to be enjoying school in general. Their experience corresponded with my early story of school where children were expected to do well in school. My daughter Annie<sup>11</sup> loved to look at books at a very early age. She often spent time turning the pages of her favourite books. Unlike her brother who as a toddler could not sit too long to listen to a story, Annie enjoyed planting herself on my lap to listen to me read her yet another story. I believed she would learn to read easily, based on her strong interest in books. However, her story as a reader evolved differently than I anticipated. She did not learn to read in Grade 1. I will not forget her first day in Grade 2. Annie<sup>12</sup> came home distressed and anxious. She worried because she could not read. A boy in her class told her she could not write. She felt hurt. She asked me if she could stay home and if I could teach her how to read. Once she could read, she would return to school. It was a stressful time for Annie. Even though she eventually started to read in Grade 2, it was a difficult time for her. She knew she was

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particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions of the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation. (p.25)

<sup>11</sup> Annie is a pseudonym.

<sup>12</sup> Annie was brought up learning French and English simultaneously at home. At school, she was instructed in French, both in the French Immersion program in Grade 1 and in the Francophone program in later grades. The Francophone schools offer a French language program to children whose parents qualify, under Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and freedoms (1982), to have their children instructed in French, the language of the minority population of the province.

*behind* most of her classmates; she often had to ask for help in the classroom. She felt labelled; she was the weak student who had to go with the reading teacher three times a week. Writing was also a challenge for her. I could not understand how this was happening. I had been reading to her since she was born, we had many books in the house, her siblings were reading, and she showed great interest in books at a very young age. How could this be happening? I never imagined my own child not learning to read as most children I taught did in Grade 1. As I was trying to stay calm about my daughter's perceived *delay* in reading, I watched Annie lose her self-confidence as she compared her personal performances to those of her peers. It was difficult for me to stand by and to know how to help and protect<sup>13</sup> her. Not learning to read in Grade 1 had a big impact on Annie. Her experience also affected me. I realize now that it interrupted my early story of school. Annie was a child who was being harmed at school. She was losing confidence in her abilities and was realizing she was not as *good* as her peers were. I could no longer believe that school was good for all children. I could not value school the way I had learned to do with my parents. I struggled to make sense of what was happening to my daughter and what might happen to other children as well. Remembering Lee's worried eyes from my early teaching years brought questions. Did he feel the same way Annie felt? In what ways did his mother make sense of what was happening? Did her son's experience interrupt her story of school? Did I do anything that might have made Lee lose his confidence or harm him? These questions and

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<sup>13</sup> Annie was losing confidence in herself at school, which I consider harmful to a child's health. I chose to use the word *protect* since I felt I had to protect her from harm, from the situations that were causing Annie to lose her confidence.

wonders that emerged from my experience as a parent and a teacher led me to a new journey, that of a researcher.

## **Researcher's Story of School**

The experience my daughter lived at school as a struggling reader<sup>14</sup> influenced me profoundly. Her experience inspired me to inquire, for my master's degree research project (Houle, 2006), into the affect of children who did not learn to read in Grade 1. Living alongside my daughter made me see how not reading in Grade 1 was a trying experience for her. Through my inquiry, children, including Annie who was one of my participants, shared with me their feelings of sadness and fear associated with their lack of skills in reading. Sadness was felt when faced with material they could not read on their own. They were scared to fail, scared to be judged, and scared to maybe disappoint their teachers or their parents. How many young students in Grade 1 classes feel this way when handed a worksheet they have to read and complete? How many children feel sad at home as they retrieve from their school bag a book they are supposed to read to their parents but can't? How many times do children face their inadequacy in school because they cannot read what most of their classmates can read? Learning about my participants' feelings through my research disturbed me. I wondered; had I made young children feel sad and scared too? Maybe . . . probably. And my colleagues, do they know how children might feel when they are unable to read? They ought to know, I thought.

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<sup>14</sup> I chose to use the term *struggling readers* in this study to identify children who had difficulties learning to read in Grade 1. That was how they were labelled or storied in the school where I did my field work.

In the fall 2006, I listened to David Bouchard, a popular Canadian author, say to a group of parents and educators that schools were not for children who could not read. How daring he was to express such an opinion about an institution that had the mandate to teach children how to read. As I was driving home that night, I kept thinking about what Bouchard had said. He was right; schools function in a way that relies on literacy skills. To be successful in school, one has to be a reader. I was an instructor in the Education Department at Campus Saint-Jean (University of Alberta) in 2006, and I became preoccupied with telling pre-service teachers about what might happen to struggling readers in Grade 1. They had to know too. I wanted the teaching of reading in schools to change. I had to alert my colleagues and future colleagues (pre-service teachers) about the difficult experiences young children might live when they do not learn to read in Grade 1.

Following a year of teaching in the Education Department at Campus Saint-Jean, I started my doctoral program. I did not know which direction my research project would take. I was excited to have the opportunity to study at such a level and to pursue my interests. My daughter's story and the topic of my master's degree still occupied my thoughts. I needed to inquire more into the experiences of children who took longer than expected to learn to read. I realized that what happened to my daughter, which caused an interruption in my story of school, had to be revisited.

My daughter's experiences changed my story of school. This was a strong moment in my stories to live by<sup>15</sup>; a moment that speaks of the tension between my daughter's lived curriculum<sup>16</sup> and the expectations of the school's mandated curriculum<sup>17</sup>. That moment also tells of tensions I felt as a mother who was supposed to protect her child from harm; despite that, I sent her to school because of the strong sociocultural and familial narrative that schools are good for children.

Another tension came from my positioning as a teacher who was aware that some children were harmed at school. I wondered how often I, as a teacher, unintentionally contributed to mis-educative<sup>18</sup> experiences (Dewey, 1938) in my students' lives.

I believe the different story of school I am composing from living alongside my daughter has placed me into a kind of liminal place<sup>19</sup>. When I shared my concerns about schools with my parents and siblings, I sensed their discomfort. They did not want me to question an institution that we had always perceived as good and valuable. I understood that they believed in a *good* story of school, as I used to. I felt connections with my brother when we both shared our experiences with our children having difficulties in

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<sup>15</sup> *Stories to live by* is a narrative term used by Connelly & Clandinin (1999) to refer to the relationship between teachers' personal practical knowledge, their professional knowledge landscape, and their identity. It is a way to think about identity.

<sup>16</sup> A child's *lived curriculum* is the curriculum that is lived out by a child. It is unique and specific to each individual (Aoki, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> The school *mandated curriculum*, also referred to as a *program of studies*, is the curriculum provided by the Ministry of Education. It is an official document in which learning outcomes for students are listed. Teachers are required to teach the mandated curriculum under the Alberta School Act. The *planned curriculum* is the curriculum planned by the teacher who plans taking in consideration the mandated curriculum and the children's lived curricula. Aoki (1993) referred to a *curriculum-as-plan*, which includes the mandated curriculum and the planned curriculum. Generally, scholars differentiate between the mandated curriculum, the planned curriculum, and the lived curriculum; I will follow this differentiation.

<sup>18</sup> Dewey (1938) wrote that "Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience" (p. 25). Consequently, an educative experience would encourage the growth of further experience.

<sup>19</sup> A *liminal place* is an undefined and in-between place of a temporary nature.

school, but I sensed he moved back and forth between our family's story of school and the experiences his son was living. Was my brother in a liminal space too? I wondered if my position as a teacher prompted me, more than my brother, to question the way schools functioned.

And Annie . . . Did she, as a pre-schooler who came from an environment where her learning was supported and accepted as it happened, feel interrupted from her story of who she was becoming when she started school and realized that she was not as good at reading as her classmates? Did she wonder why her parents were sending her to a place where she was made to feel bad? I heard her say to my mother one day, "I don't like school." I remember feeling inadequate as my mother looked stunned at hearing her granddaughter speak such words. At first, I thought to myself I have to help shift her story of school. Then I realized I could not blame her for feeling that way. I understood her early experiences in schools helped her compose a story of school as a place she sometimes wanted to avoid. Her story of school clashed with my stories of school, stories in which schools and teachers were sacred. In part then, my personal justification for the study was a search for understanding of my own stories of school. My practical justification rested on a search for ways to create schools where all children would have educative experiences. My theoretical justification was to contribute to understandings of curriculum making.

### **Research Puzzle**

My research puzzle focused on the experiences of children who struggled to learn to read in Grade 1, their parents' experiences living alongside their children, and the

experiences of the teachers who accompanied them at school. My hope was to learn from these three groups of people about their experiences living in the midst of the tensions created between the lived curriculum of a struggling reader<sup>20</sup> and the expectations of the mandated curriculum and of our institutional and sociocultural narratives.

Although my study was not specifically about learning to read, reading was the subject matter context for my inquiry. It might be tempting to think that a goal was to find another way to teach reading, one that could enable more children to become good readers in Grade 1. However, in the context of this research, it was not. My interest was in learning about experiencing perceived delays in schools within the context of learning to read. The consequences perceived delayed reading skills can have on some children (Houle, 2006; Triplett, 2004) and their families inspired this research.

In this first chapter, I inquired into my early beginnings as a child, teacher, parent, and researcher in relation to school. I shared how these early beginnings inspired my research puzzle. In the next chapter, I review some of the influences that shaped my research.

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<sup>20</sup> The children I focused on in this study were children who, toward the end of Grade 1, were identified as struggling readers by their teacher. The delay in learning to read only referred to the expectations, in regard to time, of the sociocultural and institutional narratives. I did not do any diagnostic testing. For this study, I did not wish to refer to disabilities, an extensively researched topic in the reading field. Rather, I wanted to focus on the person, not on a label or a category, as well as seeing this as a process of becoming, not something fixed (which disabilities can be).

## Chapter Two: Inspirational Considerations

Looking back at how I came to the place I am in this moment, I see peoples' faces, books, and theories. The faces belong to children, their parents, friends, family members, and colleagues. These people have all influenced and touched me in specific ways. Theoretical works have also triggered thoughts and wonders. In this chapter, I will describe who and what inspired me and shaped my current work.

### The Children

**Annie.** My daughter is, without a doubt, the most influential person who inspired me. Her struggle to learn to read helped me understand the impact such experiences have on young peoples' lives. She has become a competent reader. She loves to read in French and in English. She knows that I write about her and has given me permission to tell her stories in my work. I know she is aware she was a struggling reader in Grade 1 and Grade 2 from the comments I hear her make.

**Two former participants.** Two other young girls also helped me learn about the consequences of not learning to read in Grade 1. They were, with Annie, participants in my master's degree research project (Houle, 2006) and are children of people I know and see on occasion. Individually, they shared their feelings with me. One of them has since been diagnosed with the Irlen Syndrome<sup>21</sup>. Following the diagnosis, she was fitted with a pair of tinted glasses that helped her read better. However, she mentioned that the glasses gave her a headache and she stopped wearing them. She reads novels in her free time and, according to her mother, she can read well but does not like to read non-fiction. My

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<sup>21</sup> Irlen Syndrome, formerly called Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome (SSS), affects reading abilities. It is recognized as a processing problem in the brain, not an optical problem.



other participant apparently still struggled to read when I last spoke to her parents. They tried to encourage her to read but felt their daughter did not show interest in reading on her own. They worried about her.

## **The Parents**

Throughout my doctoral program, friends, family members, and acquaintances with whom I spoke in social gatherings showed interest in my research topic. As I explained what I wished to know more about through my research, parents often shared their children's difficult experiences of learning to read. They often told me their stories, as Michelle<sup>22</sup>, the mother of a 7-year-old girl in Grade 3, did. She described how one day after school her daughter, who had brought a book home to read, explained to her that she was only allowed to pick a *green* book. In her class, as in many classes, there were *levelled* books—books classified according to their level of complexity in reading. Children were encouraged to select a book from the level that matched their reading abilities. Michelle's daughter sadly told her mother that most of her classmates read *yellow* books and added that everybody knew what it meant to take *green* books home. Michelle's daughter was aware that she was *lagging* behind her classmates. Michelle's story brought me back to Annie's time in Grade 2 when she had to leave her class to go with the reading teacher. She felt labelled as Michelle's daughter did through the levelled books she was allowed to take home.

Other parents shared different experiences (that were not always related to reading) of children who did not *fit in* at school. Sometimes disruptive behaviours were the cause for exclusion and, for others, a condition classified as a *disability* caused the

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<sup>22</sup> Michelle is a pseudonym.

isolation. As I listened to their stories, I could hear sorrow in the parents' voices. They wanted their children to be accepted for who they were and to be acknowledged as valuable group members even though they were not *star* students.

In conversation with one of my committee members, we wondered about the number of parents who talk about their children's perceived failures in school. How many hesitate to talk openly for they feel they might be judged as parents? I remember feeling embarrassed telling my friend, a reading consultant, about Annie's inability to read in Grade 1. After all, I was a Grade 1 teacher; I helped many children to learn to read; I am a parent who reads to my children; I know what to do to prepare a child for reading. Yet my daughter could not read in Grade 1. I did wonder if I had, in some ways, failed as a parent while Annie struggled to learn to read in Grade 1.

### **A Children's Advocate**

David Bouchard, the Canadian author I mentioned earlier, was also influential in my choice of research topic. He struck me as a strong advocate for children when I met him. He inspired me by the way he personally talked about his reading struggles, those of his son, and the uncertainty he had about his youngest child Victoria, who he thought might not learn to read as soon as expected. Labelled as a dyslexic, he shared how he managed to hide his inability to read for many years. An advocate for struggling readers<sup>23</sup>, he inspired me to try to be one too.

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<sup>23</sup> I use the term *struggling readers* here since Bouchard talked in general terms about children who experience difficulties in reading.

## Theoretical Resources

**F. Smith.** In my doctoral studies, I read books by Frank Smith, a psycholinguist who wrote about language and literacy. I was drawn to his idea of how we learn from people with whom we identify and from what they do (1988a). For instance, if we identify with a painter we will learn to paint alongside the painter. Smith also insisted that we learn what makes sense to us (1988a). Smith helped me wonder if reading makes sense to struggling readers. While there are countless questions about causes and fixes for reading difficulties, I continued to wonder about what happens to children who do not learn to read in Grade 1. Smith's quote concerned me as I wondered about the reaction struggling readers might have toward their perceived delay.

Once we are persuaded by ourselves or by someone else, that we can't learn something, no amount of dedicated effort will produce success. The hardest problem for the brain is not *learning*, but *forgetting*. No matter how hard we try, we can't deliberately forget something we have learned, and that is catastrophic if we learn that we can't learn. (1988a, p. 46)

I wonder if struggling readers, who realize that they are not learning like their peers, learn that they cannot learn. Smith explained that when we associate with a group of people with whom we have similar interests, which he referred to as a *club*, we can learn from the more experienced members in the club. Some members might have less developed skills than others might but are, nevertheless, accepted within the club's community and are expected to learn even though their skill level is limited. The term *club* may sound exclusive. However, the idea of belonging to a group of people, a community, and

learning from someone who knows more than we do has promise for thinking about the lived curriculum of children. I began to imagine a classroom where children of different reading skill levels could interact and learn together in a cooperative and friendly atmosphere. According to Smith:

If we see ourselves as members of a club, then we can't help learning to be like members of the club. But if we regard ourselves as outside a club, then our brains will resist any learning that might falsely identify us as club members. (1988b, p. 48)

Could this happen to struggling readers in Grade 1, I wondered. I remember one evening walking by Annie's bedroom when she was in first grade. I saw her looking at a book and said to her, "Which book are you reading?" She quickly answered that she was not reading it, but was just looking at the pictures. What did reading a book mean to her then? Did she think she was part of the literacy club? What stories was she living and telling of herself as a reader?

**C. Triplett.** Many scholars consider learning to be a social phenomenon (Dewey, 1938; Smith, 2006; Triplett, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). Triplett's (2007) work on the social construction of struggle also shaped my research puzzle. She demonstrated, in two different class contexts, how the same children, depending on which context they were in, appeared to be either readers who struggled or readers who did not struggle. Children appeared to be good readers in class with a teacher who often initiated book talks which gave him/her opportunities to connect with his/her students and with their lives. In contrast, the same students appeared to be struggling readers in another class context where there were no book talks. Many factors can influence students' performances.

Triplett's study (2007) brought my attention to how contexts may affect students' experiences in school, and in the shaping of their identities, their stories to live by. I wonder to what extent the classroom context influenced Annie's shaping of her identity as a reader, as I think about her placement in the reading remedial program that took her away from her classmates. How did her teachers and her classmates story her?

**J. Dewey.** Dewey's (1938) philosophy about education was also influential in shaping my research puzzle. His ontological and epistemological stance followed from his view of experience that he described in this way:

The statement that individuals live in a world means, in the concrete, that they live in a series of situations. . . . An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment, whether the latter consists of persons with whom he is talking about some topic or event, the subject talked about being also a part of the situation . . . The environment, in other words, is whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is had. (1938, pp. 43–44)

In Dewey's view, education is life, life is experience and is forever changing and relational. The relational nature of Dewey's view on education resonated with how I understand learning. I understood that interactions with colleagues and instructors strongly influenced the way I learn. My learning evolved in such contexts. Dewey's emphasis on the continuity of experience, how "every experience lives on in further experiences" (1938, p. 27) also helped me understand how our past lived experiences influence our present and future experiences. Even though there is a general sense that

education leads into the future, Dewey insisted that education be for today, not a preparation for the future (1938). Dewey's ideas resonated with my beliefs that school experiences need to be related to the present moment of each child's life. How can I know what a child will need in the future, since the future is unpredictable? As Dewey explained:

We always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future. (1938, p. 49)

An educative experience today should prepare us for tomorrow. Struggling readers may experience reading as a struggle and Dewey helped me wonder about how they experience each present moment. In Dewey's theory, we learn through the experiences we live. I wonder what children, parents, and teachers learn when they bump against the expectations of the mandated curriculum when dealing with children's experiences of struggling to learn to read? What stories did Annie learn to tell about herself in Grade 1, about school, and about reading? How did her experiences shape her future experiences in school?

**D. J. Clandinin, F. M. Connelly, and T. Aoki.** While I was introduced to the term *curriculum making* in my doctoral studies, I do not believe it is part of the vocabulary of school practitioners yet. It was not part of mine until I read the work of Connelly and Clandinin (1988). For many teachers, the term *curriculum* referred to the thick document found in classrooms and consulted in planning for the school year. Professionals involved in education write the curriculum. The curriculum is passed on, in a written document, to school boards and teachers to be enacted through learning

activities planned by individual teachers. Those professionals were, in my mind, the only people *making* the curriculum. Gradually, I came to understand a new meaning for the term. *Making curriculum*<sup>24</sup> at first, seemed dichotomous to me since curriculum was the imposed document coming from the authority of our Ministry of Education. How could I make the curriculum? It was already there, all developed, and detailed. It did not need to be *made* by me, a teacher. However, I have now come to understand that, from day one, I make curriculum in my class. How I made curriculum was limited by the mandated<sup>25</sup> curriculum (Alberta Education, 2000) that I had considered as the only curriculum there was. The year before I left my position as a schoolteacher, I often felt frustrated toward the limitations I perceived from the mandated curriculum. I felt trapped and directed by the *sacred stories* of school<sup>26</sup> that impose a specific curriculum. What I did not understand then was that there were multiple curricula in my classroom: the mandated, planned, and lived<sup>27</sup>. While I did not make the mandated curriculum, I was making the planned curriculum, and the students and I together were making the lived curriculum. There was room for me to enact my own curriculum making. It is only after learning from and reflecting on the work of Connelly and Clandinin (1988), Clandinin and Connelly (1992, 1998, 2000), Clandinin, Huber, Huber, Murphy, Murray-Orr, Pearce, and Steeves (2006), Aoki (1993), and Greene (1993, 1995) in particular, that I came to

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<sup>24</sup> I understand the meaning of the terms *making curriculum* and *curriculum making* to be the same. I use them both in this paper, depending on the suitability in each sentence.

<sup>25</sup> Though curriculum developers at Alberta Education may develop the Programs of Studies and lay them out as suggestions or recommendations, when they reach the school level they are often experienced by teachers as mandated.

<sup>26</sup> *Sacred stories* of school refer to the ways dominant theoretical stories are assumed to drive practice in schools and to shape the lived stories of the people who live on the school landscape. They are said to have the quality of *sacred* stories as they are often unquestioned (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> While I am aware that there are other types of curricula in the literature and used in schools, for this study I focussed on the mandated, planned, and lived only.

imagine how curriculum could be understood, made, and enacted in class. I also recognize the insightful influence provided by the reading of dissertations and theses of fellow narrative inquirers. They are past and present colleagues who have met and continue to meet around the table<sup>28</sup> at Research Issues at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development at the University of Alberta. I am thankful to my supervisor who suggested I read their works (Chung, 2008; Mitton, 2008; Murphy, 2004; Murray Orr, 2005; Pearce, 2005). The process I engaged in, in relation to making curriculum, is still ongoing.

Curriculum is commonly understood to be “a regular course of study or training, as at a school or university” (Oxford English Dictionary Online). In *Teachers as Curriculum Planners*, Connelly and Clandinin (1988) invited us to imagine that curriculum “can become one’s life course of action. It can mean the paths we have followed and the paths we intend to follow” (p. 1). In these terms, the idea of curriculum becomes personal or specific to a person, unlike the course of study mentioned previously which is intended to relate to general collectivities “where students [and teachers] become faceless others” (Aoki, 1993, p. 265). When I shift my thinking about who makes curriculum, and how it is made according to Connelly and Clandinin’s (1992) conception of curriculum making, the teacher becomes “an integral part of the curriculum constructed and enacted in classrooms” (p. 363). Reflecting on that notion, how could the teacher not be essential in curriculum making in schools? I remember, while teaching

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<sup>28</sup> The *table* that I refer to is symbolic of the meetings that take place every week at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development. Graduate students and faculty members meet to discuss various topics around their work and lived experiences. Through this sub-section and the next one, I often refer to the work of these past and present *table* colleagues.



a course in the Education Department at Campus Saint-Jean, asking my students to think about what had helped them learn in school and what had interfered with their learning. The most significant element mentioned in both circumstances was the teacher. No matter how much support parents gave their children, no matter what the topic under study was, my students seemed to remember teachers as the most influential elements in their learning processes and school experiences. Even though teachers have been making curriculum all along, I was now awakening to it as a powerful way of thinking about school experiences.

Schwab (1962) and Connelly and Clandinin (1988) identified four commonplaces within curriculum making. These commonplaces—teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu—need to be considered whenever we discuss or think about curriculum making. Meetings and workshops I attended as a teacher often focused almost exclusively on the subject matter commonplace. There were brief mentions of the teacher in relation to lesson plans, assessment, and resources; of the learners in terms of outcomes; and occasionally of the milieu. Addressing the four commonplaces as an interactive whole represented a new way of understanding practice for me. Within the interaction of these four commonplaces, curriculum is made and lived out. The lives of teachers, along with the lives of children, both meet in schools and classrooms—the milieus—around a subject matter. This junction is a complex intersection where the lived experiences of teachers and students meet. The lived curriculum that emerges around the study of a subject matter is shaped by the curriculum-making milieu and by the milieus of teachers' and children's lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992).

Teachers hold and develop personal practical knowledge, described by Connelly and Clandinin (1988) as a kind of knowledge “embodied in each of us as we participate in educational situations. Personal practical knowledge is a moral, affective, and aesthetic way of knowing” (p. 59) and is influenced by each teacher’s past, present, and future experiences. Another kind of knowledge—nested knowledge (Lyons, 1990)—refers to what a teacher knows about his or her students and what the students know about their teacher. Murphy (2004) explains that nested knowledge “exists within a relationship and is therefore shaped by relational knowledge” (p. 188). *Relational knowledge* is “the concept of knowing through relationship, or relational knowing, [and] involves both the recall of prior knowledge and the reflection on what knowledge is perceived or present in social and political settings” (Hollingsworth, 1994, pp. 77–78). Teachers’ personal practical knowledge is also shaped by teachers’ professional knowledge landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995), that is the contexts in which they work, in and out of classrooms, “the nested and interconnected milieus” (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 29). Teachers’ personal practical knowledge (as shaped and enacted on their professional knowledge landscape) and their nested knowledge both shape how they make curriculum with their students, that is, what happens in classrooms as people’s lived experiences interact. The results of these interactions are each child’s and each teacher’s lived curriculum specific to each individual (Aoki, 1993).

The mandated curriculum<sup>29</sup> “usually has its origin outside the classroom, such as The State Department of Education, or the school district office” (Aoki, 1993, p. 257). From my experience, the mandated curriculum represents the dominant notion of what

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<sup>29</sup> Aoki (1993) referred to the mandated curriculum as the “curriculum-as-plan” (p. 257).

people think of as the curriculum in school. The lived curriculum is not openly and officially addressed.

As I planned my curriculum when I taught, I had dreams of discarding the mandated curriculum since I perceived it as unsuited for the diversity of classrooms. However, I knew it was impossible to dismiss a mandated curriculum within the institutional and sociocultural contexts in which we live. Reading Aoki's (1993) article *Legitimizing lived curriculum: Towards a curricular landscape of multiplicity*, helped me reconcile how curriculum making allows for many types of curriculum. Aoki, who recognized the value of "narratives and stories we daily tell and hear" (1993, p. 260), encourages me to move the mandated curriculum from its central position, and "give way to a more open landscape that offers possibilities by, in part, giving legitimacy to the wisdom held in lived stories of people who dwell within the landscape" (p. 267). People's lived stories—their lived curricula—need to shift toward a more central place in curriculum making. My discussions around curriculum making with Jean Clandinin, my supervisor, and the stories of teachers and children I have come to know in the work of Murphy (2004), Pearce (2005), Murray Orr (2005), Mitton (2008), and Chung (2008) supported me in the negotiation of a new definition of curriculum making, one located on a landscape of multiplicity, resonating with lives of children and teachers; one that grows in the middle; one of *betweens* (Aoki, 1993).

**M. Greene and D. Carr.** Greene (1995) reminds me that "individual identity takes form in the contexts of relationship and dialogue; our concern must be to create the kinds of contexts that nurture—for all children—the sense of worthiness and agency" (p. 41). Although I see great possibilities in such curriculum making, I also hesitate to

envision it because “one plotline does not work for all. A nurturing context will mean something unique to each child” (Murray Orr, 2005, p. 27). Teachers, then, need to know their students to be able to plan a curriculum and co-compose, with the students, a lived curriculum that will nurture each of them. That in itself is challenging as our professional knowledge landscape tells a story of teaching groups of children as opposed to teaching individuals. For Annie, her perceived delay in learning to read positioned her outside of the expectations of the mandated curriculum and into the reading recovery room. For her teachers, whose personal practical knowledge is shaped by the professional knowledge landscape, it was the appropriate and caring thing to do with Annie. I wonder how a professional knowledge landscape which tells a story of a curriculum of multiplicity would shape Grade 1 teachers’ practice with struggling readers.

Curriculum making is not a simple undertaking. However, it is important to continue to consider the complexity of making curriculum. Attending to children’s lived experiences in school will allow a more inclusive notion of curriculum for students. Chung (2008), in her thesis *Composing a Curriculum of Lives: A Narrative Inquiry into the Interwoven Intergenerational Stories of Teachers, Children, and Families*, shared a personal childhood story that inspired me to pursue this research.

Many times I was pulled out of class that year. Whenever I was pulled out for remedial English I had to go to a small room at the end of the hallway with what seemed like an enlarged sign on the door noting “Learning Assistance”. As I half-heartedly completed isolated vocabulary exercises and simple board games, I couldn’t help but wonder what was wrong with me. Why was I the last to know I was actually a struggling learner? I began to wonder if I should stop reading the

intricate novels I loved so much. In “Learning Assistance” I frequently earned prizes and even a ribbon once for my apparently exceptional efforts. These prizes did not deter me from wanting to scream and shout, “I am not dumb!” every time I was pulled for remedial instruction. Instead, I said nothing. I stayed silent. Although I had developed close friendships with children at this school, I could not help but wonder if my friends might have thought I was dumb too, for I was the only student who was always pulled out of class. (Chung, 2008, p. 34)

Chung’s story haunts me. I wonder if children like Annie, who are pulled out of class to go with a reading teacher for remedial work, feel like screaming they are not dumb as well. Do they worry about their friends’ opinion about them too? Reading Chung’s story brought back the strong emotions I felt listening to the participants, including Annie, in my master’s study. It made me think about the children who need *help*, and how they end up being labelled. How does this labelling affect who they are? Chung was identified as a struggling ESL student, a label that perplexed her for many years. As I continued to read about narrative conceptions of identity, I read the work of Carr (1986). I wonder if Chung’s experiences in school were part of her search for what Carr (1986) calls narrative coherence.

I became especially interested in the notion of narrative coherence after reading dissertations about children’s lived experiences in school (Mitton, 2008; Murphy, 2004; Murray Orr, 2005; Pearce, 2005). Carr described narrative coherence as a process of “telling and retelling, to ourselves and to others, the story of what we are about and what we are” (1986, p. 97). He pointed out that there is a constant struggle to maintain or achieve narrative coherence in the midst of the unfolding of our active and chaotic lives.

I wondered what stories Chung (2008) told of herself as a reader. What stories do struggling readers tell of themselves? Murphy (2004), Murray Orr (2005), and Mitton (2008) also used the concept of narrative coherence to attend to children's lived experiences. Some children respond to a lack of narrative coherence in their experiences in school by becoming silent or very quiet. Others might disrupt, or refuse to participate in, activities. In Murray Orr's (2005) dissertation, one student, Calvin, burst out of her Grade 2 classroom in early October and never came back to school. Calvin was fluent in Dene, his first language, but only knew a limited amount of English, the language of instruction in Murray Orr's class. While Calvin was independent and active outside of school, he was disengaged at school. It was difficult for him to understand what was going on in class because of his limited English skills. As Murray Orr retold his story, there was a lack of continuity in his story of who he was, a lack of narrative coherence.

Thinking about children trying to achieve narrative coherence brought forth memories of many former students. Remembering how they behaved in the classroom, I wondered how coherent their stories in school were. I mostly remembered those who were active and disruptive. Were they struggling for narrative coherence? What about the children who go quiet when they try to achieve narrative coherence? How many of them go unnoticed? Murphy's (2004), Murray Orr's (2005), Chung's (2008), and Mitton's (2008) telling and re-telling of their stories, informed by Carr's notion of narrative coherence (1986), influenced my research. I wondered about *disruptive* behaviours or *disengagement* as students' expressions of narrative incoherence.

When making curriculum, I believe *seeing big* will help me attend to children's narrative coherence. Seeing big, as well as seeing small, are terms borrowed from Maxine Greene (1995):

To see things or people small, one chooses to see from a detached point of view, to watch behaviours from the perspective of a system, to be concerned with trends and tendencies rather than the intentionality and concreteness of everyday life. To see things or people big, one must resist viewing other human beings as mere objects or chess pieces and view them in their integrity and particularity instead. One must see from the point of view of the participant in the midst of what is happening if one is to be privy to the plans people make, the initiatives they take, the uncertainties they face. When applied to schooling, the vision that sees things big brings us in close contact with details and particularities that cannot be reduced to statistics or even to the measurable. (p. 10)

Greene's (1995) perspectives were relevant and significant to my research puzzle. I intentionally designed my study to see big, to inquire into the lives of my participants on an individual basis. I also designed the study to see small, since those lives unfold within institutional contexts or milieus. Many conversations among educators, administrators, policy-makers, and the public can be seen as around seeing small, like discussions about the results of standardized tests. For that reason, I believed it was important to bring attention to seeing participants as big. In the context of young children's experiences in learning to read, seeing big brought me, for instance, to consider each child's individual interests and skills in suggesting reading material.

Pushor (2001) used the concept of seeing big and seeing small in her inquiry into parents' positioning in relation to the landscape of schools. She used the two different lenses to inquire into the school stories of parents, students, and staff. The back and forth movement between the two lenses, as suggested by Greene (1995), in order to comprehend one perspective while attending to the other one, helped Pushor (2001) imagine a new story for how parents might be positioned on school landscapes. I designed my study in order to contribute to a new story for children who struggle to learn to read in Grade 1.

Pushor's (2001) work also influenced me on a different level. Hesitant at first to discuss my research interest because of my emotional involvement through my daughter's experiences, I found, in Pushor's (2001) work, the courage to pursue my research puzzle. Pushor, a former teacher, principal, consultant, and administrator, had her story of school interrupted when she entered the school landscape from the position of a parent; she did not feel she had a place on that landscape. She recalled not being "awake to the positioning of parents in relation to the school landscape" (Pushor, 2001, p. 296) when she was an educator. This interrupted her story of school, one within which she felt she belonged. Similarly, my story of school was interrupted. Annie's story as a struggling reader interrupted my *smooth* story of school, a story of school as a good place for children. I did not feel Annie felt good at school. Informed by the experiences my daughter lived as a struggling reader, I imagined my inquiry as researching the experiences of children who struggled to learn to read. However, I wondered if I belonged on the university landscape, and at the researchers' table, when my strongest voice came from my positioning as a parent. I was unsure of the place parents had on the



research landscape. Pushor's (2001) commitment to finding a place for parents on our school landscapes inspired me. Her concern for valuing the experiences of parents both in schools and in her own academic pursuits helped me validate my parent positioning, and at the same time, my research puzzle. I no longer felt alone in my search for narrative coherence within my multiple positionings (daughter, parent, teacher, and researcher). As I imagined a more significant place for parents' stories on the educational research landscape, I wondered if it would influence the lived stories of children who, like Annie, end up labelled as struggling readers.

Pushor's subsequent work in collaboration with Murphy (2004) on *Parent marginalization, marginalized parents* added to ways of thinking about who I was in this research journey. In this article, Murphy explained how:

during [his] years in Fort Liard [he] became convinced that establishing communication with the home and accessing parents' knowledge about their child were critical elements in [his] teaching practice. . . . [He] no longer saw [him]self as working alone with children in a classroom, the primary holder of knowledge regarding teaching and learning. [He] now saw [him]self-working with parents, placing their voice and their knowledge of teaching and learning alongside [his] own in the classroom. (Murphy & Pushor, 2004, p. 228)

The knowledge Murphy gained alongside his students' parents showed him the significant impact working closely with parents could have on his teacher stories to live by and on his students' stories of school. This realisation changed his practice and his teacher stories to live by. He "shifted the living out of a unidirectional and hierarchical school agenda to the living out of an agenda in relationship with parents in reciprocally

beneficial ways” (Murphy & Pushor, 2004, p. 234). He no longer could envision his position as a teacher without including the parents’ voices. Stories like Murphy’s show change can happen and encouraged me to see how parents of struggling readers could affect their children’s lives if we make room for their voices and their stories.

The experiences I described previously, of Annie, of children, and of parents, along with the theoretical works I read, brought me to reflect on how curriculum is made in classrooms. As I imagined how to enact the mandated curriculum and attended to the four commonplaces within curriculum making, how could I also attend to the diversity of students’ lived experiences and nurture each child? How do I compose personal practical knowledge that will enable me to make curriculum by including a multiplicity of curricula? What kind of professional knowledge landscape will enable this? The interruption Annie’s story created in my *good* story of school dis-positioned<sup>30</sup> me. My search for narrative coherence within my multiple positionings led me to inquire into the lives of children, parents, and teachers. In my study, I saw big and looked at personal stories, putting them next to Annie’s stories and mine, and learned from the tensions brought by the bumping of the multiple curricula children, teachers, and parents found in schools.

**V. Paley.** I learned about Vivian Paley’s work in my narrative inquiry course. Paley, a retired Kindergarten teacher, is well respected for her work about young children’s play and storytelling. She wrote her books drawing from her observations and reflections about her classroom, her students, and her experiences as a teacher. She wrote

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<sup>30</sup> Vinz (1997) uses the term dis-position in relation to un-knowing and not knowing. As we un-know, and “give up present understandings (positions) ... [we] enter unsettling spaces” (Vinz, 1997, p. 139)

about how she understood storytelling and fantasy play to be significant in a child's academic and social growth. She reminds us that storytelling and fantasy play help children make sense of their worlds and of how to live with others. Her interest in children's stories drew me to her work. Paley's accounts of children's perspectives in her work are honest and insightful. Her most recent book, *The Boy on the Beach* (2010), introduced us to Eli, the boy on the beach. Seeing Eli print a big E in the sand she wrote, "I, Eli, represented by the letter *E*, am someone with ideas; I am someone who turns ideas into actions, and actions into new ideas. Furthermore, I am intended to have my own ideas" (p. 8). Paley's stories about her students and the attention she gave them interested me. Her respect for the children and their ideas were also inspirational in my design of this study. In an address<sup>31</sup> Paley delivered at a *92Y Wonderplay Conference* in 2008, she shared some ideas with the audience about children:

That's why I play the way I do, to show myself what my ideas are, and how necessary I am in the community. So I remind you of one thing, of what the most important aspect of [the] *new teacher and the children* [relationship is]. It doesn't have much to do with the curriculum. It even goes beyond the love of my life, play and story. You, one on one, can be kind to each child. You need no permission from anyone to look every child in the eye and make the child understand how you respect him and her . . . how you want to carry on this conversation . . . how much you love the child's play and talk, and everything about the child, how necessary the child is to you. You will never do a more important thing in your life. New teachers, old teachers . . . this is the great gift

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<sup>31</sup> I transcribed Paley's address and edited the text to make it more readable.

we give to each child, every day. If you come home and realize I didn't talk to John the whole day, the next morning John is the first one you talk to. Nothing replaces that. Any new teacher or student teacher can do it every single day. You will commit the greatest act of kindness that is possible in the profession of teaching. (November 14, 2008)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWxYRkmHNXM>

Paley's relational commitment to her students is a constant inspiration for me.

In this chapter, I wrote about children, parents, educational theorists, philosophers, and educational researchers whose experiences and works inspired and shaped this research. In the next chapter, I turn my attention to narrative inquiry, which is the methodology I used to conduct my research.

For my research proposal in 2009, I wrote a chapter on reading. Writing about reading, research on reading, and why I needed to write about reading initially helped me situate my work. I did not include the chapter in my dissertation because it did not seem relevant anymore. Readers interested in reading how I situated the study in relation to reading and research on reading can read the section "On Reading" in Appendix A.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **A Narrative Inquiry**

[N]arrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives both individual and social. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20)

Narrative inquiry is a methodology grounded in Dewey's (1938) conception of experience and on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative view of experience. I have understood teaching and learning to be relational and influenced by past experiences for a long time although I could not clearly express that until I was introduced to Dewey's (1938) work in a curriculum foundations course. His insistence on the relational, contextual, and temporal characteristics of experience helped deepen my understanding of how learning and teaching are experienced. Inquiring narratively (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) offered me the possibility to attend to all aspects of such a perspective on education through its inquiry space, inspired by Dewey's (1938) conceptualization of experience.

Dewey (1938) saw experience at the heart of learning, teaching, and living (Dewey, 1938). Once lived, our experiences become part of our past. They also become part of our future and our present living; they exist on a continuum (Dewey, 1938). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remarked on how experiences

grow out of other experiences, and . . . lead to further experiences. Wherever one positions oneself in that continuum—the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future—each point has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future. (p. 2).

Continuity is one of Dewey's (1938) criteria of experience. Everything we do is preceded and followed by something else that we do. We are beings who live at one point in time and whose lives evolve over time.

The other criterion in Dewey's (1938) conception of experience is interaction. Dewey (1938) saw two factors specific to his idea of experience: "objective and internal conditions" (p. 42). For Clandinin and Connelly (2000), internal conditions are "feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions" (p. 50) while the social conditions are "the existential conditions, the environment, surrounding factors and forces, people" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 69). Experience, thus, is the interaction of the personal and the social conditions, over time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) used Dewey's conception of experience and their narrative view of experience to develop a narrative research methodology called *narrative inquiry*. Experience, considered a storied phenomenon (Carr, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Crites, 1971), is lived and told in and through stories. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) understand "stories [to be] the closest we can come to experience" (p. 29). Narrative inquirers study storied experiences.

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the

world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is primarily a way of thinking about experience.

Narrative inquiry as methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375)

As a narrative inquirer inspired by the work of Dewey (1938), Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), and Clandinin and Murphy (2009), my ontological stance, or the way I see and understand the world, is through people's storied experiences, lived and told over time, and in situated relationships and places. People's experiences, or their lived stories, are lived on storied landscapes. These storied landscapes are shaped by nested social, cultural, and institutional narratives; they shape people's storied lives but are also shaped by the lives of the people who live on those landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Epistemologically, I understand knowledge as embedded in the lived experiences and nested in various milieus, times, and relationship. I privilege "individual lived experience as a source of insights useful not only to the person himself or herself but also to the wider field of social science" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 49). Experience, the basic unit in the inquiry, is expressed narratively through stories lived and told; it "cannot be isolated or broken down into smaller pieces without a loss of the wholeness of the life that produced it" (Downey & Clandinin, 2010, p. 387). As a narrative inquirer, I look at situations with a peripheral vision (Bateson, 1994) and focus out from them in order to understand their connectedness to people's lives and the stories that compose them (Downey & Clandinin, 2010).

Inquiring narratively brought me to hear and tell stories participants shared with me and to co-composed stories from living alongside them. The methodology is part of the phenomenon under study. Through the sharing of lived and told stories, the participants and I developed relationships; I learned that narrative inquirers are always in relationships with their participants (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). It was within those relationships that the inquiry lived and evolved. Narrative inquiry is essentially a relational research methodology; it is people in relation, studying the experiences of people in relation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Uncertainty and unexpectedness were to be expected from relationships while I inquired narratively (Downey & Clandinin, 2010).

As the participants and I lived and told stories, in the midst, we experienced “resonant remembering” (Hoffman, 1994), a “process of calling or catching threads from the teller’s story” (Downey & Clandinin, 2010, p. 392). As I recalled my teaching years with young children, I remembered how often a simple bandage on my finger triggered questions from my students who wanted to know what had happened to me. My telling of the story of my injury inevitably brought forth stories from the children such as Logan’s scraped knee story or Mia’s misfortune when falling off her bike. In my second language classes, I valued such exchanges as they made children willing to speak and use the language. I have always been impressed with the resonance children showed with stories they heard. It seemed like there was no end to such threading with them. Narrative inquirers are, in some ways, like my young students. As they live alongside and hear the lived stories of their participants, they let themselves be receptive to the stories the research brings forth in their minds and juxtapose them with their participants’



stories, just as Logan told of his knee injury after hearing my sore finger story. This resonant remembering was an important part of inquiring narratively; “Laying these stories side by side allow[ed] for further narrative inquiry into their resonances” (Downey & Clandinin, 2010). In my inquiry, I paid special attention to the stories I remembered and to those of the participants, as they helped deepen my understanding of what was being lived and told.

I inquired within a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space with participants. The three dimensions, or commonplaces, are the social and personal dimension, temporality dimension (past, present, and future), and place dimension (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Dewey’s (1938) influence is noticeable here. Attending to participants’ lived experiences and mine, I travelled across stories in four different directions: inward (personal—emotions, hopes, and values), outward (social—the environment, the external conditions), backward and forward (temporal), as well as through places (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is throughout this non-linear movement across stories that I inquired into my lived experiences alongside the participants’ lived experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reminded me of the *wakefulness* that characterizes a good narrative inquiry; I ought not to forget my different positionings, and how those could be shifted, as I moved in the different directions through the three dimensions of the inquiry space. When I started my doctoral program, I knew my position as Annie’s mother was significant in my stories to live by; during my study, Annie and I lived and told more stories of her as a student, as my child, and of me, her mother, a teacher, and a researcher. I knew it would shape how I storied people and events in my fieldwork and my writing. My three positions entwined with each other and

shifted over time and across places; I was never just a mother, or a teacher, or a researcher, although I often felt pulling from one or the other. Staying awake was crucial; response communities were helpful in this regard (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Theory in my inquiry was positioned differently than it might be in a formalistic view of doing research. I began my inquiry with experience, lived and told, while formalists begin with a theoretical framework (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Hale-Hankins (2003) explained her relationship with theory:

The theory for the most part makes better sense if it is contextualized in the individual narratives, because that is where it interacted with my questions. I work from the narrative up, or out, really, rather than from the theory down. To begin with theory hoping to find a place into which it fits is an attempt to force one mode of cognition onto another, an attempt at a fusion that is unlikely, according to Bruner (1986). (p. 12)

Comparable to the way Hale-Hankins (2003) proceeded in her negotiation with theory, I wove through my work significant theory that enlightened my inquiry; I did not write a separate literature review for my dissertation, a common practice with narrative inquirers (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

My motivation to pursue my research puzzle grew from my desire to help more children, including Annie, to have educative experiences in schools. I know I wanted to tell Annie's stories of struggling to learn to read and my stories of living alongside her, to make them known, but I hoped for more. I wanted to understand how to create opportunities for Annie to imagine another story of herself as a reader/learner; growth and transformation of life stories interested me (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Through

the inquiry, stories were lived and told. The participants and I told and retold stories, and in the retelling of our stories, we tried to understand them differently. Sometimes, but not as often, researchers and participants who do narrative inquiries have the opportunity to relive their stories. They live them otherwise, in their practice. That is called reliving or transformation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

## **Research Participants and Timeline**

I invited Tiny Tim<sup>32</sup> and Matson<sup>33</sup>, two children identified as struggling readers<sup>34</sup>, their parents, and their teachers (Grade 1 and Grade 2) to participate in the study. I was specifically interested in the experiences of children who felt the pressure of learning to read and felt the struggle. Because I wanted to come alongside Tiny Tim and Matson in the context of their classes, I entered the field in May 2009, in Mrs. Taylor's<sup>35</sup> Grade 1 class. In collaboration, we chose the two boys Mrs. Taylor identified as struggling readers to participate in the study and have conversations with me. I asked the two boys' parents to participate and have conversations with me as well. They all agreed to join the research project. My inquiry began and unfolded both in the telling and the living of the lives involved in the study.

I spent three mornings a week in the classroom during which I was a participant observer. I helped the students who needed assistance when the teacher indicated I could help. I focused on developing relationships and finding a place within the school community. In June 2009, I started conversations with the boys, the mothers, and Mrs.

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<sup>32</sup> Tiny Tim is a pseudonym.

<sup>33</sup> Matson is a pseudonym.

<sup>34</sup> The two boys who participated in my study were identified as struggling readers by their Grade 1 teacher, Mrs. Taylor.

<sup>35</sup> Mrs. Taylor is a pseudonym.

Taylor. Before the summer break, I began to negotiate my relationship with Mrs. Henry<sup>36</sup>, the Grade 2 teacher, who would teach Tiny Tim and Matson in September. I negotiated with the school staff the placement of the boys for Grade 2 in order to ensure they both would be in Mrs. Henry's class. I had a conversation with each mother during the summer and with each teacher. In early September 2009, I met both mothers for a conversation before I returned to the school in mid-September. I started school visits in the Grade 2 class, where I spent time developing relationships with the new group of students and with Mrs. Henry. I resumed my conversations with Tiny Tim and Matson later in September and had more conversations with their mothers and their teachers (Grade 1 and Grade 2) during the following months. I participated in the classroom life until February 2010 but continued to have conversations with the mothers and the boys until the end of the school year (June 2010). I negotiated the boys' narrative accounts with all participants during the fall of 2011<sup>37</sup>.

## **Field Texts**

**Kinds of field texts.** I used multiple kinds of field texts. First, they included field notes from observing and participating in the classroom. I recorded "actions, doings, and happenings, all of which [we]re narrative expressions" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 79). Every day after I left the school, I recorded information and comments I could not write while I helped in the classroom. I transcribed those as part of my field notes. Second, I engaged in tape-recorded conversations with each child, teacher, and parent and made transcripts of those conversations. The conversations with

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<sup>36</sup> Mrs. Henry is a pseudonym.

<sup>37</sup> I wrote in more details about entering the field, finding a school, starting school visits, my field work, and choosing the participants in Chapter Five.

the children were held in a small room by the school library while the conversations with the mothers and the teachers were at their homes, and on a few occasions, at a coffee shop. Third, I collected artefacts of children's work in class. Fourth, during some conversations with the children, we drew pictures together; I collected those as well. Fifth, I collected pertinent school documents, and sixth, I kept a research journal. I am aware that these field texts are imbued with interpretations (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Always at issue [we]re my values, assumptions, and attitudes, especially as they affect[ed] the way I "read" a school event. There is no such thing as *the* one or *a* correct interpretation of an event (conversation, lesson, activity), only possible interpretations. (Hale-Hankins, 2003, p. 8).

It is my understanding that narrative inquirers' interpretations of "events can always be otherwise. There is a sense of tentativeness, usually expressed as a kind of uncertainty, about an event's meaning" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 31). In relation with my participants, we co-constructed new meanings and new interpretations throughout the unfolding of the inquiry; those helped me imagine new possibilities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in regard to children's lived curriculum in schools.

**Co-composing field texts with children.** I first thought about doing research with young children for my master's degree. A professor, then, warned me about the difficulties of interviewing children. She did not think children could easily and freely speak with adults; she thought adults' positions of authority in relation with the children interfered with their telling. Another colleague talked about children's limited vocabulary and their challenge to describe their thinking. I was directed to Kirova's (2003) conception of a board game "for initiating conversations with children about their

experiences of loneliness” (p. 3). Kirova believed the game context would enable “an equal relationship to be established between the players as they [took] turns” (2003, p. 6). Child and adult would be able to participate and communicate outside of the “unequal power relationships [found in interviews] with adult as interviewer and child as interviewee” (Kirova, 2003, p. 6). For my master’s degree research, I used an adapted version of Kirova’s (2003) game to help my young participants talk about their feelings about learning to read (Houle, 2006).

When I learned about narrative inquiry, I saw more possibilities for doing research with young children. The three commonplaces of the methodology’s inquiry space allowed me to develop, over time, and within specific places, relationships with the children. Unlike what I did for my master’s research, I did not meet the children only for one session. I lived alongside them, three mornings per week, over seven months. I was able to develop relationships with the children; the stories they shared with me were embedded in those relationships. In addition, I believe my efforts to move away from behaving like a teacher<sup>38</sup> during my fieldwork helped minimize the unequal positions adults and children often have in schools. I wanted the children to story me as someone to whom they could tell their stories.

Huber and Clandinin (2002) inquired into the complexities they encountered in doing research with children as co-researchers. They reflected on their assumptions about who held narrative authority<sup>39</sup> among their participants after noticing tensions from

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<sup>38</sup> This is discussed in more details in Chapter Five.

<sup>39</sup> Huber and Clandinin (2002) drew on Olson’s (1995) idea that we author our lives and on her notions of narrative authority. Olson explained:

I understand authorship to be the narrative expression of a person’s agency and intentionality as he or she constructs meaning through experience. When we think of Dewey’s notion of the

hearing Azim's stories, a boy who told Huber stories that she found "inappropriate for sharing" (2002, p.789). Huber and Clandinin (2002) described the complexities of narrative authority drawing attention to the way one's narrative authority does not stand on its own; rather, it is authored in relationship with others who are also in the process of authoring their lives (p. 799). During their inquiry, Huber and Clandinin (2002) wondered about the seldom acknowledgement of children's narrative authority on "classroom, school, and research landscapes" (p. 792). Upon reflecting on my master's degree research, I remember wondering about acknowledging children's narrative authority. During this doctoral research, I tried to stay awake to how I positioned my participants' narrative authority and to the complexities it involved, as shown by Huber and Clandinin (2002).

Annie's narrative authority permeated my parent and researcher stories of her, through the struggle to learn to read, and during the subsequent years she spent in school. I listened to her words and her stories; I believed her. She shared her lived experiences with me, as she lived and experienced them. Her stories, told in the space of our relationship and in the privacy of our home, had narrative authority.

Paley's (2007) words about teaching children resonated with me.

As we seek to learn more about a child, we demonstrate the acts of observing, listening, questioning, and wondering. When we are curious about a child's

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continuous and interactive nature of experience, this authoring is not a simple matter of setting out on an individual course. Authoring a life is a complex process. This complexity becomes obvious when we consider each person as the author of his/her own life, a life which is continually in interaction with others authoring their lives. (p. 125)

words and our responses to those words, the child feels respected. The child *is* respected. (p. 157)

In listening to Annie's stories, I respected her. Although Paley (2007) wrote in the context of teaching, I felt her words applied to my research context. I wanted the children to know I was curious about them and about their stories. I wanted them to know I respected and believed the stories they told me.

### **Field Texts to Research Texts<sup>40</sup>**

Trying to imagine how to structure my research texts, I returned to my research puzzle. Through this narrative inquiry, I wanted to learn about the experiences of children who struggled to learn to read in Grade 1, their parents' experiences living alongside their children, and the experiences of the teachers who accompanied them at school. After discussions with my supervisor, Jean<sup>41</sup>, we decided that I would write four narrative accounts: one for each boy in Grade 1, and one for each boy in Grade 2. The narrative accounts told the boys' stories intertwined with their parents' and their teachers' stories. Although this research was multiperspectival, the boys were the focus in the narrative accounts because they were at the heart of the research project. Had they not been struggling to learn to read, I would not have engaged in a research relationship with them, their parents, and their teachers. Writing an account for Grade 1 and one for Grade 2 helped highlight how the research happened over time (during their Grade 1 and Grade 2 school years), in different places (two different classrooms), with different people

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<sup>40</sup> Following my supervisor's suggestion, I wrote methodological notes throughout the entire process of transitioning from field texts to writing research texts. That helped me write this chapter.

<sup>41</sup> From my second year in my doctoral program up until I graduated, Jean met with me on a weekly basis to respond to my work. During our meetings, I shared writings, wonders, worries, and many stories.



(different teachers, different classmates, different relationships), while doing different school work (different activities). Those were dramatic changes in the boys' lives. The choice for writing the four narrative accounts reflected my intention to show those significant changes.

**Processing the field texts and writing Grade 1 narrative accounts.** Once I had all the conversations with participants transcribed, I started reading all the field texts I composed and gathered from my fieldwork. I had numerous files of field texts including field notes from the classroom; transcripts of conversations with Tiny Tim, with Matson, with each mother, and each teacher; Tiny Tim's and Matson's drawings; school documents; and a research journal. Initially, I felt overwhelmed by the amount of field texts. I was unable to choose a file and start reading. I assumed that if I read transcripts of conversations with Tiny Tim, for example, I would need to refer to the field notes written in the classroom on the days of the conversations to make sense of my reading. I thought I would need to go back and forth between different files in order to understand the contexts involved in my reading, and to appreciate the lived curricula of the participants. I decided to re-sort my field texts based on temporality, in monthly binders, with everything in chronological order.

As I read field texts, I underlined every piece I felt was significant about Tiny Tim and Matson: what their teachers or parents said about them; what I said; what other children said. Some of the field texts did not seem relevant to the writing of the boys' narrative accounts; I put them aside. After reading one week's worth of field texts, I pulled out and transferred information relating the boys to a document I called *monthly overview of field texts*. These pulled-out pieces were copied one after the other on the

overview document<sup>42</sup> as I temporally reviewed my notes and indicated the date (the week only)<sup>43</sup>. While underlining and writing notes, I attended carefully to the different voices involved. It was important to identify who said what, as I tried to interpret and analyse how everyone involved in the study constructed Tiny Tim and Matson. I was also mindful of the three dimensional narrative inquiry space (time, place, and sociality). Once I had attended to one month of field texts and copied the notes to the overview document, I printed two copies: one copy on which I highlighted pieces about Tiny Tim and a similar copy for Matson. I read the pulled-out pieces many times and wrote notes next to some of them. The notes helped me think about possible narrative threads for the narrative accounts. I thought about each boy, who he was, how the field texts spoke about him, how he storied himself, and what seemed important to him. I thought about how his mother and his teacher storied him, and what seemed important to them. That helped decide the threads I would include and write about, in the narrative accounts. After I read and analysed all the field texts from May 2009 until August 2009, I wrote Tiny Tim's narrative account for Grade 1, and later, Matson's.

**Thinking ahead—Negotiating the narrative accounts with the boys.** Jean asked me how I planned to share the narrative accounts with the boys. Being that they would only be 8 years old, I could not share a long written text with them. It took me a few weeks to imagine how I could share the narrative accounts with each boy. I remembered the book *Voices in the Park* by Anthony Browne (1998). The author wrote a

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<sup>42</sup> Those documents represented interim research texts that helped me transition from field texts to research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

<sup>43</sup> When I read the field texts from May 2009 – August 2009, I did not indicate the exact dates or the page numbers from the field texts. I had to return several times to my field texts to consult them and found it time consuming to locate specific pieces. For the following months, I diligently indicated the complete dates and page numbers from the field texts, which facilitated the subsequent consultations.

story about people going for a walk at the park. What made his book interesting for me was its multiperspectival aspect; Browne wrote the story in four parts, from the perspectives of a mother, a father, a boy, and a girl. I found Browne's book concept inspiring, considering the multiple voices in my study. I decided that I would write a book for each boy, borrowing Browne's idea. One book I called *Matson's Story* and the other one *Tiny Tim's Story*. I picked parts from the narrative accounts I felt best represented the boys' stories of themselves and of school and the mothers' and teachers' stories of the boys in Grade 1. The different perspectives from which I wrote represented my understanding of the stories lived and told. I chose pictures to illustrate each page and left it to be completed after the writing of the Grade 2 narrative accounts. I purchased copies of Browne's book to give to each teacher and family at the time I planned to negotiate the narrative accounts with them.

**Processing field texts and writing Grade 2 narrative accounts.** I read and analysed the field texts from September 2009 until June 2010 following the process I described for the Grade 1 field texts. For that period, there were considerably more field texts than I had for Grade 1. I composed another interim text where I grouped comments about the boys according to who made them. I needed to see what the mothers and the teacher said about the boys. I also wanted to see how the boys storied themselves. This allowed me to identify threads in the boys' stories. I then returned to my monthly overview documents and tried to match the pieces with the threads I chose. That coding activity done, I started to write Matson's Grade 2 narrative account, one thread at a time. I returned several times to the field texts while I wrote the narrative accounts and paid attention to the three dimensions of the inquiry space. I completed the narrative account

after I inquired into, and wrote about, all the narrative threads. I chose pieces from Matson's Grade 2 narrative account to write the second part of the book I would use to negotiate the research texts with him.

**Negotiating Matson's narrative accounts.** After I officially stopped having conversations with the participants in July 2010, I kept in touch with Marie<sup>44</sup> through phone calls and email messages. I had not seen Matson for over a year. I hoped he would feel comfortable with me. I negotiated the narrative accounts with him first. It was important for me to show the narrative accounts to the boys before the other participants, as they were the focus of the research. I went to Matson's house on September 23, 2011. I showed him the copy of *Voices in the Park* I bought for him. I told him I copied Anthony Browne's idea to write his book. I read Matson's *Story*<sup>45</sup> to him. His mother, Marie, was present during our meeting. During the reading of the book, I felt Matson was comfortable with me. I told him the book was a draft and if there was anything he thought I should change in it, he should let me know. Matson liked the book and did not ask for any changes. He asked if I would give him a copy. I promised I would. He looked happy.

I met Marie on October 23, 2011, at her house to share the two narrative accounts with her. She made a few comments during the reading. She found the stories represented her perspective well, and she did not think anything should be changed.

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<sup>44</sup> Marie is a pseudonym. She was Matson's mother.

<sup>45</sup> The copy of the book, *Matson's Story*, as well as the one for Tiny Tim had real names when I shared them with the boys, their mothers, and their teachers. I gave each boy a copy of their book including their real names. I put the books in Appendices B and C. I replaced the real names by the pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

The following week, on October 12, 2011, I went to Mrs. Henry's house to share Matson's Grade 2 narrative account with her. I had phoned her on a few occasions over the previous year to keep in touch. She invited me to sit in her living room. I gave her a copy of *Voices in the Park* and explained that I wrote Matson's book following a similar model. She read *Matson's Story* and made comments as she turned the pages. I had to read the narrative account to Mrs. Henry because where we sat, there was too much distance between us for her to see the pages I brought. I told her to let me know if she wanted me to change something. She listened carefully and made some comments. There were a few words in the text that she found did not accurately represent her stories of Matson. One word, *troublemaker*, particularly irritated her; she did not like it to be associated with her. She asked that I change it because it appeared a number of times. I told her I would, and we negotiated different words to replace those we removed. The word *troublemaker* was originally used by Matson's mother. I had used it thinking it would be okay with Mrs. Henry. It was a word she insisted she would not have used. I explained to Mrs. Henry that I could attach a footnote to the mother's words to explain her comment. I believe she was okay with that, but I felt uncomfortable with her irritation. I left her house in time to go meet Mrs. Taylor at Ramsey Elementary School after the children had left. I wished I could have spent more time with Mrs. Henry.

I met Mrs. Taylor in her classroom. I had talked to her over the phone a few times and had exchanged a few email messages during the year that had just passed. I gave her a copy of Browne's book as well and explained again how I used Browne's idea in Matson's book. I shared *Matson's Story* with her and told her to let me know if I should change something. We then read Matson's Grade 1 narrative account. I did not

feel it was necessary to share the Grade 2 narrative account with Mrs. Taylor, just as I did not share the Grade 1 narrative account with Mrs. Henry; I did not think it was relevant to her at this point. Reading the book *Matson's Story* gave the teachers a glimpse into the narrative account of the child when he was in the other grade. When we were done reading the Grade 1 narrative account, she asked that I change a few words she felt did not portray her actions the way she interpreted them; we negotiated new words to replace those. I left the school and drove home.

During the week that followed the negotiation of Matson's narrative accounts with the teachers, I wrote a letter to Mrs. Henry. I had left her house in a hurry and wondered how she felt about our meeting. I communicated to her my appreciation for the clarifications she brought to the narrative account and sent the letter to Ramsey Elementary School. I did not receive a response to that letter.

**Writing Tiny Tim's Grade 2 narrative account.** I returned to the monthly overviews of the field texts from Grade 2. I reread many transcripts of conversations I had with his mother, with him, and with Mrs. Henry. I needed to immerse myself into Tiny Tim's life again. I wrote his account after I pulled what I saw as narrative threads from his stories, the same way I did for Matson's narrative account. Something was different, though, in the writing of this account; I often caught myself imagining how Mrs. Henry would react to my writing, and how Mrs. Taylor would as well. I constantly wondered about the participants' reactions through the writing of the previous accounts, and at times, I felt confused about what to include, how to express certain things, and what to leave out; I did not want to harm the participants with my words. For this narrative account, ethical concerns preoccupied me much more than during the writing of

the previous narrative accounts. While I wrote Tiny Tim's narrative account, Mrs. Henry's irritation with the words I showed her when I shared Matson's narrative account kept troubling me. I did not want to upset her again but worried it might. It preoccupied me substantially. I shared my concerns with some colleagues who encouraged me to *tell my participants' truths*. I wondered about narrative authority for all the participants and for myself. I finished writing Tiny Tim's narrative account and shared it with Jean. Her response to it mattered to me. I needed another opinion before I could share it with Tiny Tim, Morgan<sup>46</sup>, and Mrs. Henry. When it was completed, I chose pieces to include in the second part of the book *Tiny Tim's Story* that I would use to negotiate the research texts with Tiny Tim.

Writing research texts in a narrative inquiry is a relational process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I know my feelings about my participants, and the relationships I had with them, shaped my writing; they also shaped me as a researcher. Through the writing process, I learned a great deal about the complexities of doing a multiperspectival narrative inquiry.

**Negotiating Tiny Tim's narrative accounts.** Tiny Tim and his family moved to another Canadian province in July 2010, after he finished Grade 2. I had once spoken with Morgan on the phone, exchanged email messages, and wrote to Tiny Tim twice by the time I visited them in Bradford, on December 12, 2011. Morgan picked me up at the airport and took me to her house. We sat at the kitchen table. I gave Morgan a copy of *Voices in the Park* and again, explained its relevance in the making of the book for Tiny Tim. She read *Tiny Tim's Story* and started the Grade 1 narrative account. I reminded

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<sup>46</sup> Morgan is a pseudonym. She was Tiny Tim's mother.

Morgan that the narrative accounts were drafts, and she should let me know if she wanted to make changes. She made comments during the reading but did not ask to change anything. We started to read the Grade 2 narrative account but stopped to go and pick Tiny Tim up from school. We had lunch with him; that helped him and I reacquaint ourselves with each other. We left him at school after lunch and returned to the house to finish reading the narrative accounts. Morgan found I represented her stories and Tiny Tim's stories well. She did not want any changes. We went to pick Tiny Tim up after school and took him home. He showed me his room and took me to the family room where we spent one hour reading and talking. I showed him *Tiny Tim's Story*, the book I wrote about him, and told him we could change anything he felt we should change. He liked the book and made comments as we read it. He did not want any changes either. Later that day, Tiny Tim and his family gave me a Christmas present, took me out for dinner, and drove me to the airport.

Upon my return to Edmonton, I made appointments to meet Mrs. Henry and Mrs. Taylor on different days. I did not want to have to rush out again. I met Mrs. Taylor at a coffee shop on January 2, 2012. She began the conversation by mentioning how some stories of Matson I shared with her in October had her thinking. She was trying to understand his experiences. She talked about her students and her teaching. I shared the book *Tiny Tim's Story* first, and we followed with the Grade 1 narrative account. Mrs. Taylor made comments as we read but did not ask to change anything.

I met Mrs. Henry at her house again, on January 9, 2012. This time I asked that we sit at the kitchen table where she could read the narrative account herself. She had baking for us to eat. We read *Tiny Tim's Story* and read the Grade 2 narrative account.



During the reading, I read a few parts aloud and let her read other parts silently. She made comments as we read and remained silent at times. I included some of her comments in the narrative account to help clarify some situations. She did not always agree with what the mother said about certain Grade 2 class routines, but I believed she understood it was the mother's perception that she read, and she could not change that. We had conversations about topics addressed in the account. She asked questions about my remaining doctoral work. We had a good visit. The apprehension I felt while I wrote Tiny Tim's narrative account had gone. I believe the care I put into writing the account being mindful of all participants' perspectives, including Mrs. Henry's, helped me write an account that respected the relational ethics of narrative inquiries.

**Writing multiperspectival narrative accounts.** The time I spent alongside Tiny Tim, Matson, their mothers, and the two teachers provided me with a window into their lives. Writing the narrative accounts required that I carefully piece together the stories they told me, and the stories we co-composed together. Those narrative accounts represent one version of their lives at those times; it is my version, and how I understood their lived experiences through their telling and retelling, their living, and through my participation in their lives. Even though I was the one who put the written words on the pages, I saw it as a co-composition. The words I was inspired to share, which appear on these pages, I picked meticulously, considering all participants. At times, though, their lives seemed at risk, as I felt that what I wrote from others' perspectives might hurt their feelings once they read them. I constantly reflected on the advantages and disadvantages of including specific fragments of stories, keeping in mind the participants' stories as well as our relationships. It is in that spirit that I chose the words for this dissertation.

The multiple perspectives contributing to the narrative accounts made possible the writing of the two boys' stories through a process that reminded me of Bateson's (1994) *peripheral vision*. I sometimes imagined the participants and me standing at the top of a lighthouse, attending to the horizon from different positions, covering 360 degrees. In this research, we took a moment to acknowledge and know better the horizons of each boy's life. The children, the parents, the teachers, and I collaborated to compose a chapter in the boys' life stories. With everyone's help, I wrote stories about Tiny Tim and Matson, intertwined with their mothers' and teachers' stories of them and of themselves.

One of the most challenging aspects of my research was to share particular comments the mothers made about the teachers. I saw these as moments when lived stories bumped. Telling Mrs. Henry what Morgan reported Tiny Tim saying is an example of that: "He doesn't necessarily like what she does sometimes. . . . He's scared to talk to her about things" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). I struggled to find the most ethical thing to do in that situation: tell Mrs. Henry what I considered to be a potentially hurtful comment about her or silence Morgan's and Tiny Tim's stories, and say nothing about Tiny Tim being scared of her. I chose not to silence their stories, but it took courage for me to do so. It was within the relationships I developed with each participant that they shared their stories with me, and it was within those fluid relationships that I shared the stories of them, that others told me. "Relationship is key to what it is that narrative inquirers do" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 189).

**Response communities.** I had many response communities during the course of my doctoral program. They significantly helped me progress with my work. Every

Tuesday, I looked forward to going to the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development. As mentioned earlier, Jean welcomed me in her office at the same time every week. She listened to my stories, shared some of her stories, and responded to my writing, my wonders, and my frequent worries.

During my fourth year in the program, I met for one hour with Sandra Jack-Malik and Ted Paszek, two doctoral students, after meeting with Jean. At that point, we were all in the process of writing our dissertations. I was thankful to Sandra who initiated the group and to Ted who joined us. We shared pieces of writing among the three of us and responded to each other. Over time, I felt we developed a strong sense of community in our response group. At the end of my fourth year as a doctoral student, Sandra moved to a different city, but Ted and I continued to meet most weeks.

From 12:30 until 2:00 p.m., still on Tuesdays, I met with a number of faculty members, graduate students, educators, visiting scholars, and sometimes, family members around the big table at CRTED<sup>47</sup> to share our work and parts of our lives.

On days when I stayed home to work on my own, I often felt the need to share my work with a colleague and wished for responses. Those days, I regularly conversed, via Skype, with Lenora LeMay, who was also writing her dissertation.

Steeves (2000) wrote about the table at CRTED:

a place where people are safe to be . . . a place . . . [where] attending to storied

lives is first and foremost . . . [where] we are safe to talk about what matters to us.

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<sup>47</sup> CRTED is the acronym for Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development where Dr. Jean Clandinin is the director.

[Where] we feel others in their listening and response . . . the caring community that creates the nest so we can grow. (pp. 182—183)

I entirely agree with Steeves (2000) about the table and feel the same way about my meetings with Jean, Sandra, Ted, and Lenora. In those response communities, as Eliot Mishler pointed out in an interview with Clandinin and Murphy (2007), we support each other but we also learn from each other. The responses I received from my colleagues and gave to them shaped my writing, and, without a doubt, helped me move forward.

### **Ethical Considerations**

A friend asked me early in my doctoral program why I was pursuing graduate studies. Without hesitation, I explained to her how my daughter had had trouble in school, and I wished my research would help more children feel good in school. As Noddings (1986) explained:

Fidelity to persons counsels us to choose our problems in such a way that the knowledge gained will promote individual growth and maintain the caring community . . . Such research would be genuine research *for* teaching instead of simply research *on* teaching. (p. 506).

I believe my intentions were to encourage growth, in a caring way, and that I did research *for* teaching, but above all, I did research for the well-being of young students, like my daughter.

As required, I adhered to the ethical guidelines of the University. I used pseudonyms to protect my participants' confidentiality. I informed them, as best as I could, about the purpose of the study, and how it would take form, while keeping in mind

the unexpected nature of school situations and people's lives. I provided the participants with consent letters and reminded them of the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point in time. I hope my participants found my intentions were honourable and honest, comparable to Pushor's intentions, who wanted her participants to:

know that the words in [her] research ethics review—"minimal risk", "informed consent", "potential harm and benefit," "protection of the staff's anonymity and confidentiality" did not represent an ethic of responsibility to [her] but instead an ethic of care (Noddings, 1992) and that it would be in a caring and thoughtful relationship that [she] would inquire, alongside them. (2001, p. 74)

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) explained the ongoing concern for ethical inquiries throughout research projects. "Ethical considerations permeate narrative inquiries from start to finish: at the outset as ends-in-view are imagined, as inquirer-participant relationships unfold, and as participants are represented in research texts" (p. 483). I discussed in the section, *Writing Multiperspectival Narrative Accounts*, in this chapter, how I struggled to keep some of the participants' stories in the accounts; I anticipated discomfort in sharing them with all the participants. "When stories are lived and told within shared narrative unities, we see our ethical responsibilities in new ways. We need to care for the stories, and the people we are in relation with, more thoughtfully" (Huber & Clandinin, 2002, p. 796). I did not want to harm anyone in the study. I felt responsible for the research texts I composed, a moral responsibility (Huber & Clandinin, 2002). For example, I was concerned about Tiny Tim who would read that Mrs. Taylor felt he was not quite where she wanted him to be at the end of Grade 1 (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). I thought it might hurt his feelings. I discussed those concerns

with Vera Caine, who was on my supervising committee; she encouraged me to consult with the teacher and the mother before I shared it with Tiny Tim. She mentioned that he might have already known how his teacher felt about his reading skills. I composed the narrative accounts in collaboration with the participants, with a constant concern for their lives. Coles (1989) reminded me that “Their story, yours, mine—it’s what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them” (p. 30). I initiated this journey we took; the participants joined me upon my invitation. I felt responsible for them and hoped they thought it was an educative journey for them, as it had been for me.

At the time that I was thinking about sharing my writing with Tiny Tim, my daughter Annie was living frustrating school experiences, not feeling good about herself as a learner. I did not want my writing to make Tiny Tim feel bad. I knew my daughter’s experiences kept shaping my researcher’s stories. I had to stay awake to my dispositions during the research. Consulting with Vera helped me temporarily move away from my daughter’s stories and reconsider my concerns from a different perspective, but it was not simple. I wrote many pages preoccupied by the participants’ responses to my writing. Jean often reminded me how they might all, one day, read the dissertation. Tiny Tim and Matson might read it later. How would they feel about it then? Jean also reminded me to think about how what I wrote would help children, parents, and teachers; that was helpful as well.

The well-being of my daughter Annie was also in my thoughts. Even though she recently asked me to change her name and use a pseudonym, her identity could be discovered as she allowed me to use her real name in previous publications. Did I do the

right thing in disclosing information about her? Could my work have a negative impact on her in the future? Will she dislike what I wrote about her in the years to come? I periodically discussed the nature of my work with Annie. She knew I wrote about her experiences when “she found it difficult to read and write”, as she told to me. Did she understand the full implications of her presence in my work? Did I? It was with caring intentions that I shared the details of my child’s experiences and mine, hopeful that what I learned from this research would help struggling readers. The disclosure of our stories seemed a logical and natural choice for me. It helped explain the origin of my research and its significance. I believed our stories needed to be told, so I could inquire into them, alongside the stories of my participants. King (2003) wrote about how stories we hear change how we live. I hope the stories in this study help change how struggling readers live in schools.

## **Looking Ahead**

In the pages that follow, there is a chapter describing my early experiences in Mrs. Taylor’s class, how we came to choose participants, and my wonders about my researcher identities. Chapters 5 and 6 introduce the readers to the lived and told stories of the two boys in Grade 1. In chapter 7, I tell the stories of re-entering the field in Mrs. Henry’s class after the summer break. Chapters 8 and 9 focus on Tiny Tim’s and Matson’s experiences in Grade 2. In chapter 10, looking across the boys’ narrative accounts, I pull forward threads and tensions that resonated among them. In chapter 11, I share some learning I did in this study and imagine forward looking stories for myself.

## **Chapter Four: Researcher's Early Beginnings**

In this chapter, I describe my entry in the field as well as my experiences in the classroom during the first few weeks of my presence at Ramsey Elementary School including, classroom activities, the process by which I chose my participants, and tensions I experienced around my researcher identities.

### **Finding a school**

I successfully defended my research proposal in April 2009 and was ready to enter the field. A committee member at my candidacy exam helped me connect with a school superintendent who agreed to let me conduct my research in a school in his district. He soon identified a school principal interested in the study. I wrote to the principal who agreed to meet with me later that week.

On the agreed day, I drove to Ramsey Elementary School, in a suburb of a large city in western Canada. A number of adults were chatting in the school foyer when I came in. A man looked at me and said, “Are you Sonia?” (Field notes, May 7, 2009); he was Ken<sup>48</sup>, the principal. He welcomed me into his school and directed me to an office where we sat down and talked for a while. I told him where I came from and talked about my experience with my daughter who struggled to learn to read. Upon hearing that, he shared that his Grade 2 son was starting to read, but it had taken him a while to learn. He added that his Kindergarten daughter was catching up to his son (Field notes, May 7, 2009). He seemed worried, just as I worried about Annie. We had an experience in common. I thought that might help him understand my interest in the research topic

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<sup>48</sup> Ken is a pseudonym.



and might help me gain access to the school. I carried on and began to describe my research when he offered to take me on a tour of the school (Field notes, May 7, 2009). I was nervous. I wondered if that meant I was going to do my research there. As we walked, Ken talked about the curriculum he made with the students, the teachers, and the parents. He explained that even though there were multiple classes of the same grade in the school, all the grades were spread out through the school (Field notes, May 7, 2009). I sensed pride in Ken's comments; he was showing off his school. We kept walking and stopped by a small room where a teacher and a child worked. Ken introduced me to them (Field notes, May 7, 2009). We continued to walk and made our way to the classroom of a Grade 1 teacher, Mrs. Taylor, whom Ken described as a *master* teacher (Field notes, May 7, 2009). We walked in and interrupted the class; the teacher did not seem to mind the disruption. We stayed for a few minutes. Ken asked a girl to show me the classroom pet snake, Angie. A cute child with a wiggly tooth proudly came to take Angie out. She was the snake's caretaker; that meant she took her home every Friday (Field notes, May 7, 2009). She showed Angie to me and put her back into her cage. Shortly after that, Ken, Mrs. Taylor, and I walked out to the hallway for a brief conversation while the children worked. Ken explained to Mrs. Taylor that I wanted to study children who had not learned to read yet (Field notes, May 7, 2009). She asked, "Who can't read at all?" (Field notes, May 7, 2009). I answered, "Who feel the struggle" (Field notes, May 7, 2009). She told me she believed all her students thought they were readers (Field notes, May 7, 2009). She and Ken mentioned the names of a couple of students and thought I would be able to find participants in their school. I was amazed at how accommodating

and cooperative Ken and Mrs. Taylor were. I felt warmly welcomed by the teacher and the principal. I could not wait to start my visits to the school.

Ken and I left Mrs. Taylor to her students. We returned to the office where I gathered my belongings. Before I left, Ken gave me Mrs. Taylor's email address so I could write to her and schedule my visits. He also reminded me to bring in the consent forms<sup>49</sup> (Field notes, May 7, 2009). I asked if he would inform the parents about my presence in the classroom. He told me Mrs. Taylor would be able to handle that with my help (Field notes, May 7, 2009).

### **Starting School Visits**

Through email messages, Mrs. Taylor and I negotiated a visiting schedule that both accommodated my research design and fit with her class activities. My preference was to come three mornings per week, but I was also open to coming in the afternoon and spending full days if needed. We agreed on three mornings for the following week. Mrs. Taylor said she looked forward to starting. She shared that she loved having new people in her classroom and looked at it as an opportunity for her and her students to learn (Field notes, May 7, 2009). I was grateful for her attitude and for her warm welcome.

In the following pages, I describe the first few visits I made to the classroom. I provide information about the class that I gathered in the following weeks. I also describe what I saw as literacy activities in Mrs. Taylor's room and later tell of the tensions I experienced as a new researcher in the classroom.

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<sup>49</sup> The information letters and the consent (and assent) forms are in Appendix D.

## Early Experiences in the Classroom

**First day in the classroom—(May 12, 2009).** On my return to the school, I found Mrs. Taylor in the foyer. She told me I needed to sign in. She accompanied me to the office and left. After I signed in, I went to Mrs. Taylor's classroom. It was Monday morning; the children had lots to tell their teacher after the weekend. Renee<sup>50</sup>, the snake's caretaker, showed Mrs. Taylor her new teddy bear. It was all dressed up. Mrs. Taylor commented to Renee on how dressed up her bear was and told me she was one of her "girly girls who like[d] frills" (Field notes May 12, 2009). She also mentioned to Renee that had she known she would be absent last Friday, she would have given her the Mother's Day present Renee had made for her mother. She asked Renee if she went on a last minute trip. Renee replied, "No, it was a two-day trip" (Field notes May 12, 2009). Mrs. Taylor and I looked at each other and smiled. I loved being with children again and being part of their spontaneous, and sometimes, naive way of interacting and making sense of their worlds. The trip was not a last minute trip but a two-day trip. What a priceless comment, I thought.

After the bell rang, the children sat at their desks and Mrs. Taylor introduced me to the group. She asked if I wanted to be called Mrs. or Miss (Field notes May 12, 2009). I told her I would like to be called Madame Houle. I showed the children how to pronounce my name and explained that I was French. I felt I had to tell them that part of my personal history because of my noticeable accent when I speak English. I assumed they would wonder why I spoke that way. I talked about when I taught Grade 1, and that I could teach them French songs. Some children shared French words they knew and

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<sup>50</sup> The participants' Grade 1 classmates' names are pseudonyms.

others mentioned Spanish words (Field notes May 12, 2009). Talking about French made some of them think about Spanish. I smiled again.

After my introduction and a brief conversation with the children, Mrs. Taylor began to instruct her students. The principal stopped by and peeked in the classroom. Some children waved at him. The following days, he did not come by every morning. I thought he might have been curious to see if I were in on that first day. When I met Ken in the hallways, he was always pleasant and cooperative with me. I felt he supported my presence in the school.

As the morning went by, I tried to know the children. I listened to them interact with each other. I watched their reactions and responses to the work they did, their interactions with their teacher and their peers, and noticed how some of them paid attention to me. Some children asked me how to spell words, and others wanted to learn French words. After a while, I asked Mrs. Taylor what she wanted me to do. She told me to observe and added she did not need help yet. I was a little disappointed I would not interact more with the children, but I understood I had to be patient before I could be more active in class.

At recess, Mrs. Taylor took me to the staffroom where she introduced me to her colleagues. She told them I was from the university and was researching the experiences of children who learned to read, especially those who struggled (Field notes, May 12, 2009). The teachers sat on couches and chatted until the bell rang.

We returned to the classroom. It was time for music. Mrs. Taylor asked two boys, Matson and Mark, to decide which one of them would stay back and read for her. Matson stayed. The rest of the group left for their music class, and I sat at a table where

Mrs. Taylor handed Matson a book. She asked him to talk about the picture on the cover, and later, asked him to read the book aloud. I noticed how he hesitated to read some words. Mrs. Taylor helped him by reminding him to sound out words and gave him tips. She asked Matson to talk about the characters, the settings, and about what happened at the beginning. She was assessing Matson's reading. At one point, I thought of how well Matson could read compared to how Annie did when she was in Grade 1. Mrs. Taylor asked Matson who read to him at home. He told her his mom did, and sometimes, his dad did too (Field notes, May 12, 2009). She also asked him if he liked to be read to, or if he liked to read by himself. He answered "I like reading. I do good" (Field notes, May 12, 2009). Later, Mrs. Taylor told me she thought Matson's reading comprehension was okay but mentioned that he did not predict much (Field notes, May 12, 2009).

Matson was the only student whose reading was assessed while I was in the classroom. Tiny Tim's mother told me her son's reading was assessed earlier in the year (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009), and I wondered if all the students were assessed. I do not know if the assessment was mandated. I wondered if it was a routine assessment. From the brief comments Mrs. Taylor made, I understood that she needed to assess a couple of students to verify their reading level and to gather data for the report card at the end of June.

Before I left the school, I had a 15-minute conversation with Mrs. Taylor. I shared Annie's experience with learning to read in Grade 1 and Grade 2. Mrs. Taylor talked about her daughter who only learned to read in Grade 2, and how she did not think it was a problem. She said she was confident her daughter would learn (Field notes, May 12, 2009). I mentioned Annie had challenges with phonics. She shared comments about

her students who struggled with reading. Toward the end of our conversation, I explained that my research was not on reading but about the experiences children, parents, and teachers had around the struggle of learning to read in Grade 1 and Grade 2. Mrs. Taylor seemed to understand the nuance in my work and expressed interest in reading my proposal.

**Second day in the classroom—(May 13, 2009).** There was a school assembly in the gymnasium that day. Children were gathered on the floor, some parents sat on the benches along the walls of the gymnasium, and some toddlers and pre-schoolers ran around. I liked the idea of having parents and younger siblings attend the assembly. I felt the principal welcomed families into the school, not only students. During the assembly, the principal introduced me to the school community.

I wanted to blend in and be part of the school. I had to be patient. I noticed Jake, a boy in Mrs. Taylor's class, calling me by my name and asking me to come and watch him at recess. He remembered my name. I was making progress. Another boy in the class, Tiny Tim, checked if I brought French songs as I mentioned I would when the teacher introduced me to the class. My integration into the group seemed to be moving forward. Later that day, during a writing activity, Mrs. Taylor asked me to help Anna sound out words. I was happy to give her a hand.

**Third day in the classroom—(May 15, 2009).** I wrote all the children's names in my field notes so I could learn them all. A substitute teacher was in that morning replacing Mrs. Taylor who told her I could help with the children (Field notes, May 15, 2009). I was happy to hear that. I figured Mrs. Taylor was starting to know me, and felt comfortable with me interacting with her students. Thea, a student in the class, gave me

a hug. I interpreted Thea's spontaneous hug as a welcoming statement. Relationships were developing. I started to feel part of the classroom community.

**Second week in the classroom—(May 18—22, 2009).** In addition to developing relationships and negotiating how to be and help in the classroom, I had to find participants. I wondered about a number of students. I also needed to plan my visits for the following week.

Through email correspondence, Mrs. Taylor and I determined which days were best suited for my visits. Every week, Mrs. Taylor checked her timetable and picked the three mornings she felt worked for me to come. The best mornings were those during which the class stayed in the classroom, uninterrupted by other curricular or school-wide activities. From one week to the other, my mornings spent in class varied according to Mrs. Taylor's preference. Through email correspondence, we briefly discussed potential participants (Mrs. Taylor & Sonia, personal communication, May 18, 2009). These conversations continued in the classroom, mostly during Mrs. Taylor's preparation periods.

Early during the second week, I showed Mrs. Taylor the information letters and the consent forms I wanted to distribute to the parents and the students. I made copies and gave them to Mrs. Taylor who agreed to pass them to the children the following day. She offered to collect the forms when the children returned them. Regrettably, I had to go out of town for 10 days, to a conference. I would have preferred to stay and learn more about the children. Time was passing fast; June was just around the corner. I knew I had to make decisions about participants upon my return.

**Beginning of June in the classroom.** I was happy to return to the school after my conference. I felt disconnected after being gone for 10 days. I had to readjust to the class, and they had to do the same with me. All the nineteen children in the Grade 1 class returned their forms signed and all the parents had consented. Mrs. Taylor gave me some time one morning to explain the information letter and the assent form to the children. Although I explained to the children the reason for my presence in their class on my first day, I wanted to know what they understood about it. I asked them before reading the information sheet and found out that some children thought I was there to teach French, while others thought I was teaching and testing reading (Field notes, June 4, 2009). I was surprised to hear the children say I was there to test reading. I had never mentioned testing during my visits. I did not know how they assumed I would test them. Mrs. Taylor did not mention the word testing when speaking about my work or me. I wondered if parents understood I would test the children's reading. More than once<sup>51</sup>, my research was mistakenly perceived as research on reading. I wondered if the children associated me with the reading assessment their teacher did with Matson the second day of my fieldwork. They might not have known I did not assess Matson's reading, but Mrs. Taylor did. I needed to be clearer with the children on what I did in the classroom. I told them I did not do tests, and I did not teach. I added I was a student who had to do a research project, and the one I chose was about what it was like for children to learn to read in Grade 1 (Field notes, June 4, 2009).

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<sup>51</sup> Some colleagues and friends with whom I discussed my research topic thought it was about learning to read.



I hoped the conversation with the children helped them understand who I was, and what I did in their class. The children all agreed to sign the assent form (Field notes, June 4, 2009), which turned out to be a challenge. Some students talked about handwriting but did not know, yet, how to do that. It was interesting to see what they knew about signatures. Some of the children seemed to be aware of the formality of a signature. I thought they might have watched their parents sign documents or credit card bills before. I wondered what six-year-old children understood about the signing of an assent form.

**Class routine around literacy activities.** By the beginning of June, I felt comfortable with the children and Mrs. Taylor. My visits were exclusively in the morning. I observed several literacy activities in Mrs. Taylor's class. The children often read during the day. They read poems written on the board along with their teacher or in small groups with peers. They read books, on their own and with partners. During *self-selected reading*, five groups<sup>52</sup> of readers were assigned to one basket of books each<sup>53</sup>. Each group had a designated area in the classroom where they read. During that period, the children could read alone or with a partner. When reading with a partner, they were encouraged to *partner read*, which meant they took turns, each reading a page, a paragraph, or a sentence. They could also *choral read*; in this case, they read in unison. Some *copycat read*; that is, one student read a sentence, a paragraph, or a page and the other child repeated what the previous student had read. I found the self-selected-reading activity very inclusive for all the students.

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<sup>52</sup> I do not know how the groups were created.

<sup>53</sup> Mrs. Taylor put a variety of books in each basket so the children could pick books according to their level of competency.

Mrs. Taylor often read books to the children. When she did, the class would gather in the book nook where children sat on cushions, beanbags, and blocks. The book nook was an alcove at the back of the classroom in a round shape that Mrs. Taylor decorated. At the time I was in the classroom, the book nook looked like a castle. The children also wrote stories they read to the group in the book nook.

Additional literacy activities included: reader's theatre<sup>54</sup>; letter and word games<sup>55</sup>; spelling activities; and tests<sup>56</sup>. For the home reading program, the students brought one book home every night and returned it the next day. Parent volunteers managed the program.

**A double privilege.** I felt privileged to have the opportunity to do research in Mrs. Taylor's class. I also felt privileged to have the possibility to observe a colleague and her students in action and to be allowed to help whenever possible. I remembered having mixed feelings about strangers coming into my classroom when I taught. I was a stranger for Mrs. Taylor, and I was mindful of that. She had to trust me to open the door for me. I enjoyed watching Mrs. Taylor interact with students and colleagues. I found her attentive to children's various needs and well-being. She frequently highlighted her students' strengths, made positive comments to them and about them, and treated them with such respect. I learned much.

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<sup>54</sup> Reader's theatre is the reading of a script involving a number of readers who portray the characters of a story. It does not include props or costumes. The readers use their voices to animate the story read.

<sup>55</sup> Mrs. Taylor gave children letters with which they had to make words; she gave them clues in the form of riddles to help find the words.

<sup>56</sup> The students had five new words to study every week on which they were tested with a spelling test.

## Choosing Participants

When I first visited the school, Ken and Mrs. Taylor mentioned the names of two students who could be participants in the study (Field notes, May 7, 2009). Mrs. Taylor said those students would be going into Grade 2 but noted that they struggled (Field notes, May 7, 2009). I did not clearly hear the names of the students, but I remember the willingness with which Mrs. Taylor and Ken responded to my research requirements. Mrs. Taylor was extremely cooperative about finding suitable participants. When she assessed Matson's reading, I sensed she had concerns about his reading skills; I figured that he could be a participant. Mark was also asked to stay for the reading assessment (Field notes, May 12, 2009). I suspected Mrs. Taylor worried about Mark as well.

I consulted Mrs. Taylor regularly about the students in her class and asked her opinion about who would fit the research. I paid attention to the few children she mentioned for the study. I noticed how Tiny Tim often asked for help; how Matson looked at a book but did not seem to read the words; and how Mark skipped many words when he read to me (Field notes, June 1, 2009). The discussions Mrs. Taylor and I had about choosing two participants funnelled down to three possible choices: Mark, Matson, and Tiny Tim. None of the girls in the class seemed to qualify. I would do my research with boys only.

Mrs. Taylor invited me to write to her if I needed to talk about the boys we considered for the study (Field notes, June 1, 2009). I told her I would discuss the three possible participants with Jean and let her know what we thought. Jean and I spoke about Tiny Tim, who was young, and who was a weaker reader, compared to most of his

classmates (Field notes, June 1, 2009). Jean wondered if Tiny Tim felt the struggle. Mrs. Taylor thought so (Field notes, June 1, 2009), and I believed he did because he often asked for help in class. He did not hesitate to come to me when he needed assistance. In addition, I felt Tiny Tim would want to have conversations with me. We also talked about Mark and his timid personality. I spoke of Matson too, who could read but not fluently, and how he needed help with writing. I thought he felt the struggle as well. I was confident he would agree to talk to me. Jean and I thought I should talk to Tiny Tim's and Matson's mothers first, to see if they would consent to participate in the study. I would consider Mark if needed.

I told Mrs. Taylor about the outcomes of my conversation with Jean. She thought Tiny Tim was a good choice. She expressed reservations about Matson; she felt his behaviour was problematic for the last part of the school year. Where I sat at the back of the classroom, I could not hear what Matson said. I hoped he would cooperate during our conversations. I told Mrs. Taylor I would try with Matson and would ask him to participate. I felt the chances were better with him than with Mark. Mrs. Taylor added she thought the boys' mothers would gladly speak with me and offered to arrange meetings with them. To my delight, Mrs. Taylor said she would attend the meetings. We briefly discussed what we would tell the mothers. She suggested we meet after school. She phoned the two mothers and planned the meetings.

By the end of the first week of June, I had met with the boys' mothers and acquired consent for them and their sons to participate in the study. Matson and Marie Johnson, as well as Tiny Tim and Morgan Robinson, agreed to work with me. I looked

forward to start my conversations with each of them and was thankful Mrs. Taylor suggested I talk with the boys during class hours (Field notes, May 20, 2009).

## **Tensions around Researcher's Identities**

On many occasions during the first few weeks of my fieldwork, I was faced with dilemmas. Those dilemmas came from the confusion I felt in relation to who I was in the school and in the classroom. I entered the field as a researcher, but I was also a parent, a teacher, and an adult. In this section, I describe the tensions I encountered, their nested contexts, and how I made sense of them.

**Touring the school.**                      *Hello, pleased to meet you!*

*I would like to do research in your school.*

*Could you not say who I am, and what I do?*

When Ken took me around the school and introduced me to a teacher and a child who worked in a small room, he told them I was a PhD student from the University of Alberta who did research on emergent readers (Field notes, May 7, 2009). The introduction made me uncomfortable for two reasons: first, for being introduced as a PhD student coming from the university, and second, for his use of the term *emergent reader* in regards to my research. Being a university student doing research for doctoral studies sounded too formal. I was in the school to learn and did not feel being introduced as such, conveyed that. I worried about how I would be storied. I did not think Ken tried to make me feel uncomfortable. Rather, I think he was happy to have a partnership with the university and wanted his teachers to know about it.

Hearing Ken talk about emergent readers also concerned me. What sense did the young student make of the words *emergent readers* as she sat, isolated from her peers, working with a resource teacher? I worried she might think it was something bad. I hoped she did not pay attention to the words *emergent readers*. I remembered that my daughter noticed comments referring to her difficulties. I did not want another young girl to feel what Annie had felt. I do not think Ken meant to make anyone uncomfortable. Reflecting on this brief exchange and on how the child might have perceived the word used to describe the children I wanted to study, my thoughts turned to words educators use to describe children. Do the words educators use to describe children influence how they are storied, and how curriculum is made with them in schools? I had been mindful of labels in my research, and to my surprise, soon after I arrived in the school, labels were already associated with it. I realized that when teachers talk about students, they do so using labels. I was quickly reminded that my study was about labelled children: struggling readers, delayed readers, and emergent readers.

When I met Mrs. Taylor, Ken introduced me as a PhD student. I felt uncomfortable again. I did not know what people thought when they heard *PhD* student. I just wanted to be in the school and draw as little attention as possible. I went home that day reflecting on the gap I felt there was between PhD students (researchers) and practitioners in schools.

**Signing in.**

*Of course, I will sign in.*

*Visitor or volunteer? Visitor, okay . . .*

*Could I be neither one?*

When I went to sign in on my first day, I was asked to identify whether I was a *visitor* or a *volunteer*. Mrs. Taylor and I wondered which description I should check off. Mary<sup>57</sup>, the administrative assistant who was listening to our conversation, said I was a "visitor" (Field notes, May 12, 2009). On my way to the classroom, I wondered who I was exactly. Often volunteers in schools are parents who come to help with various tasks, such as organizing hot lunches, photocopying, sorting books in the library, and so on. I was there to collect data for my work; it was not volunteer work. Did Mary think I was a visitor because I was not in parent in the school? I did not feel like a visitor either. I thought of myself more as an invited a guest, not a visitor. I first came to the school as a visitor, but Ken and Mrs. Taylor had invited me to come back. Did that not make me a guest? I knew I would be at the school for a long period. Over time, I hoped to become a friend or a *regular*, at least, for a while. None of the categories I thought might suit me were listed in the sign-in binder. Why were there only two categories, I wondered. And why did it matter whether I was a volunteer or a visitor? Why the label? Why not simply sign my name without a label?

The school landscape, I noticed, was a place for labels and categories. On that landscape, people belonged to definite groups. Categories do not suit people so easily, I was reminded. Having to choose between visitor and volunteer made me reflect on how labels work, and how they can be unclear and limiting. Trinh (1989) pointed out that "[d]espite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak" (p. 94). In some aspect, I could have been a volunteer, and in others, I could have been a visitor. It all depended on how these categories were defined, and how

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<sup>57</sup> Mary is a pseudonym.

they were interpreted. Categories leak, indeed. They leak for the maker of the categories, as well as for who interprets them.

Not fitting into either category, no matter how trivial the context was, made me feel like an outsider. This made me think about young struggling readers who do not fit in because they cannot read as well as their peers. Do they sometimes wonder who they are, as I did in the school? Trying to figure out who I was made me experience the discomfort associated with not fitting in to set categories. Learning to read in Grade 1 is a category. Children who do not learn to read in Grade 1 become part of the other category, the non-readers or the strugglers. In my situation, I did not fit in because I was, to a certain extent, a volunteer, and to another, a visitor; it was not clear who I was. I belonged to the two categories. For struggling readers, it is different. They are part of a category because of a weakness, a deficit. Drawing on Trinh (1989) who explained how “‘difference’ is essentially ‘division’ in the understanding of many” (p. 82), I thought labelling children as struggling readers divided them from the rest of the class.

**Visiting the staffroom.**      *It's recess, coffee break.*

*Research makes you cringe. Hmmm . . .*

*I'll sit here, by myself.*

*But I'm a teacher too.*

I appreciated Mrs. Taylor introducing me to the staff on my first day in the classroom. I thought it was important for them to know who I was as I would be in the school on a regular basis and would interact with children. For safety reasons, I had to be introduced to the school community. Upon hearing that I was from the university and was researching the experiences of children who learn to read, especially those who struggled,



one teacher shared that she had just finished her master's degree and hearing the word *research* made her cringe (Field notes, May 12, 2009). I learned she did her degree while she worked full-time. It would have been a demanding workload, I thought. Hearing I did something that made her cringe, I wondered. Did I make her cringe?

I returned to the staffroom a few days later in an effort to know more teachers. I tried to be part of the school community. On that particular day, there was no room for me to sit where all the teachers gathered on the couches. I sat at a table, alone, and looked for something to read. Being on my own and trying to be busy, I felt like an outsider, even though I was a teacher too. Fortunately, that was not how I felt in Mrs. Taylor's room.

**Watching Matson's reading assessment.**    *Matson, can you read this?*

*I watch from his left; she watches  
from his right.*

*But . . . will he feel labelled?*

*What will the kids think about  
me?*

I did not have the opportunity to discuss the assessment Mrs. Taylor did with Matson on my first day in the classroom. I never told her how uncomfortable I felt sitting next to Matson and watching him be assessed. I was aware it was the time of the year teachers report on their students. Assessing students' reading was part of a teacher's job. I think Mrs. Taylor thought she could assess Matson's reading, and at the same time, help me get to know him, as I was interested in struggling readers. Yet, it made me feel like I was intruding. Matson did not know me. During the assessment, he did not read fluently and

hesitated when he answered questions his teacher asked. He seemed uncomfortable. His teacher was assessing him, moreover, a stranger was watching. I do not know what he thought that day, nor if he would have behaved differently had I not been there. I just remember feeling out of place. In retrospect, I think I was concerned he might feel labelled, a constant worry for me. The teacher had only asked two children to stay for the reading assessment; there were nineteen children in the class. I wondered why she did not ask the other students. Mrs. Taylor had mentioned Matson and Mark when discussing research participants (Field notes, June 2009). Did she assess only weaker readers? Did Matson feel labelled? He and Mark were not the best readers in the class; they would have been aware of that. They might have made a connection between who Mrs. Taylor wanted to assess and their limited reading skills. I wondered how my presence affected him that day, and if it had an impact on how he perceived me. Throughout my fieldwork, my relationships with the participants were always on my mind. I experienced Matson's assessment positioned as an adult with authority. That was not how I wanted the children to story me.

**Being noticed.**

*The girls noticed me. They like me!*

*That's a good start.*

*Please don't notice me!*

*Maybe she can . . .*

The first morning I spent in the classroom, Julie often looked at me. Each time I caught her eyes in my direction, I responded with a smile. At one point, she and a classmate came to work where I sat. Shortly after joining me, they started to whisper. I could not hear what they were saying. Later, I heard Julie say aloud to her friend as she smiled,

“yes, she’s nice” (Field notes, May 12, 2009). They were talking about me. I was relieved. I really wanted to be liked and accepted by the group. The research methodology I chose relied on relationships; being liked by the children in the class was important to me.

When the principal introduced me to the whole school during the school assembly (Field notes, May 13, 2009), I felt many eyes staring at me. I timidly waved at the crowd. I did not enjoy that much attention but understood the need to be introduced. I felt confused; on one hand, I wanted the children to notice me in the classroom, but as soon as I stepped outside, I wanted no attention. The participants’ confidentiality was a concern for me. Later that day, one of Mrs. Taylor’s colleagues welcomed me into the school. I appreciated her thoughtful gesture, especially after the cool experience in the staffroom the previous day. The imaginary line I had drawn to protect confidentiality of the research participants was not so clearly defined anymore. Being in the school felt like a convoluted juggling act.

**Helping in the classroom.**

*Sure, I’ll help Anna.*

*Spell or sound out?*

*Will this help?*

I started to see the complexities of participating in the classroom as a helper when Mrs. Taylor asked me to help Anna sound out words. I was hesitant because I was not sure how I was supposed to help her with her spelling. I wanted to give the teacher a hand, but I did not want to confuse the children. Did Mrs. Taylor want me to spell the words for Anna, or was I supposed to help her sound them out? I did not want my help to confuse the children. I needed to know more about the class, but I could not always ask

Mrs. Taylor for clarifications. My doubts about the pertinence of my help made me to wonder again, about who I was in the classroom.

**Disciplining the children . . . or not.**

*Me, discipline the children?*

*Sorry, I can't.*

*But . . . I feel so useless.*

Before I started my visits to the classroom, I tried to imagine how it would go. I thought I would watch the class and help when the children needed assistance. I also thought I would give Mrs. Taylor a hand with various tasks in the classroom. I never thought my authority with the children, or lack thereof, would raise concerns. One day, when Mrs. Taylor asked me to supervise the children for a few minutes, I asked a student to stop running in the classroom. She ignored my request and kept running. I worried that she might fall and get hurt or hurt someone else. It was not a safe situation. This incident made me reflect on who I was in the classroom. My position as a narrative inquirer required that I develop relationships that encouraged the participants to talk to me about their experiences. I needed to be more like a friend to the children. I could not behave like a teacher and discipline them. Unfortunately, not acting like a teacher became problematic when the adults in the school relied on me to discipline the students and saw me for who I was, an adult.

I became hesitant about being left alone with the children. I needed to explain to Mrs. Taylor where I stood in relation to supervising and disciplining the children. I shared my dilemma with her; she understood my point and apologized for leaving me with the children (Field notes, June 11, 2009). I was sorry she felt like that and wished I

could help more. I was learning I could only help in certain ways, regrettably. I appreciated Mrs. Taylor's cooperation with the requirements of my research.

Being a researcher, and not a teacher in the classroom, required that I shift my adult authoritative way of thinking and being in a classroom. It was not easy. To be unable to discipline the children made me feel anxious at times. I did not like children ignoring my requests. That was not how I storied myself as a teacher. I knew I could manage students but in Mrs. Taylor's class, the children did not see me as their teacher; she was their teacher, not me. In the end, I recognized that it was best for me not to supervise the children, even though I felt useless knowing I could not be left alone with them. My multiple identities bumped on this school landscape where I needed to redefine myself given that, for the time being, I was a researcher, not a teacher.

**Meeting the mothers.**

*Glad you joined the study.*

*I picked your sons because . . .*

*Because they're just so cute!*

*Can I say that?*

When Mrs. Taylor phoned two mothers, she told them I was interested in doing research with their child and asked if they would come to the school to meet with us, to discuss their participation in the research project (Field notes, June 4, 2009). The two mothers agreed to come.

Mrs. Taylor was present for both meetings with the mothers. She held the meetings in her classroom and participated in the conversations. I explained the research to the mothers, and that I would have conversations with their sons and with them. I

shared my daughter's story, but I was uncomfortable about telling the mothers we picked their sons because they struggled to read. I did not want to offend them. I remembered how I felt when Annie was struggling with reading. I did not want her to be labelled. I was not in a position to make judgements about children I hardly knew. While I did not want to divulge to the mothers why we had picked their sons, I wanted to be honest with them. They had to know the research involved struggling readers. In the end, I did not mention that their sons struggled with reading; Mrs. Taylor did. She told Marie that Matson struggled with reading and told Morgan that reading was hard work for Tiny Tim. I appreciated Mrs. Taylor's input about the boys. She knew her students, and was in a better position than I to comment on them.

**Pulling tensions together.** The tensions I discussed in the last pages raised concerns and provoked thoughts for the beginning researcher I was when I entered the field at Ramsey Elementary School. In an effort to inquire more into them and learn from them, I picked ideas from each tension and juxtaposed them in a layered poem<sup>58</sup>. The words in the poem represent my interpretation of the events in the school.

#### An Unsettling Entry

*Hello, pleased to meet you!*  
*I would like to do research in your school.*  
*Could you not say who I am, and what I do?*  
*Of course, I will sign in.*  
*Visitor or volunteer? Visitor, okay . . .*  
*Could I be neither one?*  
*It's recess, coffee break.*  
*Research makes you cringe. Hmmm . . .*  
*I'll sit here, by myself.*  
*But I'm a teacher too.*

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<sup>58</sup> In this layered poem, the first one, two, or three lines in each verse are mostly descriptive while the last one brings in a tension felt by the researcher.

*Matson, can you read this?  
I watch from his left; she watches from his right.  
But . . . will he feel labelled . . .  
What will the kids think about me?  
The girls noticed me. They like me!  
That's a good start.  
Please don't notice me! Maybe she can . . .  
Sure, I'll help Anna.  
Spell or sound out?  
Will this help?*

*Me, discipline the children?  
Sorry, I can't.  
But . . . I feel so useless.  
Glad you joined this study!  
I picked your sons because . . .  
Because they're just so cute!  
Can I say that?*

I pulled forward two interconnected threads from the tensions highlighted in the layered poem; one is about identity and the other is about labels. My experience as a researcher entering the field offered opportunities to reflect on who I was in the school. Often, I wondered how to behave, how to respond, what to say, what not to say. Many times, I felt conflicted. I wanted to do research in the school but did not want to be recognized as a researcher within the school community. I worried about participants' confidentiality, and how adults in the school might story me. I wanted to fit in with the teachers, but they did not all value research; I did not feel like I fit in. I wanted to watch children read but did not want to be associated with assessing. I wanted the children in Mrs. Taylor's class to notice me and like me but wanted to go unnoticed outside the classroom. I wanted to help Mrs. Taylor and help the children, but I was unsure of how to be helpful. I could not discipline the children but adults in the school assumed I would. I wanted the mothers to participate in the study and to consent for their sons to

participate as well, but I did not want them to think of their sons as struggling readers because of me. Who was I at Ramsey Elementary School?

Identity has been the subject of many scholars (Gee, 2000; Miller-Marsh, 2003; Moje & Luke, 2009; Soreide, 2006; Watson, 2006). There are different meanings in the literature about identity; “What these various meanings have in common is the idea that identity is not a fixed attribute of a person, but a relational phenomenon” (Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop, 2003, p. 108). I understand I have multiple identities. Each of these identities is fluid, and changes over time and across places and relationships. Miller (1998) saw the incompleteness in our stories and in who we are. Greene (1995) reminded me that, “[to] be yourself is to be in process of creating a self, an identity” (p. 20), who we are not yet. As a new researcher at Ramsey Elementary School, I found myself creating a new self, a new identity. My new identity as a researcher in a school gave me a different outlook on a landscape I knew so far as a teacher, a parent, and a student. The stories from that landscape, the people, and the places shaped my researcher identity and my other identities. My stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) shifted in the negotiation of new stories to live by at Ramsey Elementary School. I was in the process of creating myself (Greene, 1995).

Labelling haunted me more than once during the study. Working in the field raised my awareness for the nature of my research topic. Labelling was part of the process, even though I wanted to avoid it. To do this research was to label, right from the start. This caused worries, as I did not want to encourage storying the two participants as strugglers. The teacher called them strugglers and informed the mothers about why we chose their sons for the study. I wanted to study labelled children without labelling them.



I wanted to study struggling readers while secretly hoping to spare them the hardship that labels could bring to their lived experiences. Even though I did not label the children, I asked the teacher to label them. Khayatt's (2001) words made me reflect:

Who is entitled to determine who we are? How are those labels made to apply to various people? What do the labels really signify, and how does that translate itself in the experiences of the individuals to whom they are applied? (p. 79).

I wondered how the label *struggling reader* would translate itself in the experiences of the children in the study. How would it shape the curriculum their parents and their teachers made with them? Would the other children find why Mrs. Taylor chose them? The ethics to do no harm preoccupied me. How would I be able to accomplish that, I wondered.

I pondered on how sometimes educators exclude children based on their abilities to perform on tests and assignments. McCarthy and Moje (2002) reminded me that, Traditionally, many educators have relied on essentialist views to explain why certain kids do not do well in school. We have tended to use labels to characterize students as *shy* or *aggressive*, *motivated* or *lazy*, and this has given us license to dismiss our own roles as educators in promoting school failure. When we consider identities to be social constructions, and thus always open for change and conflict depending on the social interaction we find ourselves in, we open possibilities for rethinking the labels we so easily use to identify students. (p. 230)

Rethinking the label I used in the study still brought tension. My intentions to study struggling readers without labelling them created a dichotomy I found puzzling and

disturbing. My multiple identities were being shaped by my new relationships at the school. I wondered how my presence alongside the children shaped their identities. I hoped for a good story of school for the participants.

In the next chapter, I tell Tiny Tim's stories in Grade 1, intertwined with his parents' and his teacher's stories of him and of school.

## Chapter Five: Meet Tiny Tim—Grade 1

The following is a narrative account I co-composed with Tiny Tim, his parents, and his Grade 1 teacher, Mrs. Taylor. It describes Tiny Tim's experiences, both in school and at home, intertwined with his parents' and teacher's experiences of living alongside him.

### **Being Tiny Tim—Morgan and Jay<sup>59</sup>, Tiny Tim, Mrs. Taylor, Sonia**

**Being small.** I was excited about having Tiny Tim as a participant. It was easy to feel attracted to him. He was talkative, sociable, and charming. I remember noticing Tiny Tim among his peers on my first day. He was one of the smallest children in Mrs. Taylor's class. It was he who picked his Tiny Tim pseudonym. He told me his brother used to be called Tiny Tim (Field notes, April 24, 2010). One day in June, Mrs. Taylor took her students outside to play a game called *Skin the Snake*, a game that required the children to reach over to their classmates' hands, and help them pass through each and everyone's legs. Tiny Tim did not want to play; Mrs. Taylor said it was okay and that he could watch (Field notes, June 11, 2009). I wondered why Tiny Tim did not want to play. I assumed it was because he was small. Playing would be uncomfortable when bigger children tried to go through his short legs.

Tiny Tim never said anything to me about his height. His brother, Luke<sup>60</sup>, was also small and, according to his parents, Tiny Tim looked up to his brother (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009). I had perceived that as well from the comments he made about Luke (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009; June 17,

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<sup>59</sup> Jay is a pseudonym. He was Tiny Tim's father.

<sup>60</sup> Luke is a pseudonym.

2009). Being short did not seem to be a problem for Tiny Tim. Luke was successful in many aspects and to Tiny Tim, he was a positive role model, despite his small stature. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009).

**Being young.** Not only was Tiny Tim small, but he was also young compared to the rest of the class. Mrs. Taylor pointed that out early (Field notes, May 19, 2009) and Morgan, his mother, often mentioned how her son was younger than most of his classmates (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009; August 31, 2009). Tiny Tim's father also spoke of his son as being younger (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009). Tiny Tim was born in January. To be eligible to enter Kindergarten in September, children had to be 5 years of age by the end of the following February (School board document, November 26, 2010). Therefore, most of Tiny Tim's classmates were older than he was as his birth date was closer to the cut-off date. Most children were born between March and December, which consequently positioned Tiny Tim in the younger group of students in his class. This position in the group will remain likewise until the end of Grade 12 for him. He will always be one of the youngest students in his grade.

**Being small and young.** Being small and young compared to his classmates was part of who Tiny Tim was. I wondered if that influenced how people interacted with him. His size had made me notice him the first day I was in the classroom. During an in-class conversation, Mrs. Taylor said, "[Tiny Tim] is young, January baby. He is not very strong but he knows it is because he is young" (Field notes, May 19, 2009). His mother told me, "I think he's so young, he'll catch up" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009). Tiny Tim's parents and teacher were supportive of him. They hoped he

would succeed and do well in school, but they knew he was *struggling* (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009). They referred to his young age to explain his difficulties, even though Tiny Tim met the age requirements for Grade 1.

Being young was deeply entrenched in Tiny Tim's school story. In the class, there were different groups of readers based on reading skills. Tiny Tim was part of the weaker readers' group (Field notes, May 20, 2009). When Mrs. Taylor suggested Tiny Tim as a participant; she added, "He feels the struggle. He is young" (Field notes, June 1, 2009). Being young was a trait that characterized Tiny Tim not only on the school landscape but also in his home with his parents. His mother shared how her eldest son, Luke, was "right in the middle of the pack, age wise. His birthday is in August. He's not really younger than everybody or older than everybody" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009). She carried on about Tiny Tim; "He's . . . small, I mean he's small but he's also younger. So put with the same age and he's average, right. Hmmm, but Tiny Tim is still, he's still conscious of everything" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009).

During our August conversation, Tiny Tim and his brother joined in to talk about their summer holiday; Morgan asked them to tell me about something they saw during their holiday (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009).

Tiny Tim:     The Hoover dam? . . .

Morgan:       The river dam, right.

Tiny Tim:     Yes, we did, but we didn't do the big tour. I had to be bigger, but  
                    Luke could have done it.

Morgan:       You had to be 8.

Tiny Tim: It wasn't fair. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Tiny Tim, August 31, 2009)

Although Tiny Tim said he needed to be bigger, his mother specified that he needed to be older (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Tiny Tim, August 31, 2009), not bigger. I wondered how Tiny Tim understood the rule at the river dam. Did he think he was too small or too young? Did he associate being small with being young?

### **Sorting Books—Tiny Tim**

Besides a table and chairs, there were blocks and toys in the room by the library where Tiny Tim and I met for our conversations. The room was located between the library and a Kindergarten classroom, and because of its position, it served as a storage area for Kindergarten toys. Tiny Tim liked to play with the toys while we talked (Field notes, June 17, 2009). One day, when I asked him to tell me about the home reading program, he proceeded to pick some of the stored blocks to help explain it (Field notes, June 10, 2009). The blocks served to represent bins containing different kinds of books. He called them SW1<sup>61</sup> books, SW2 books, SW3 books, and so on (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009). From what I understood from Tiny Tim's account,<sup>62</sup> the students in his class took a book home every night to read to a parent. The program included tracking of what each child read. Tiny Tim tried to explain the process to me when I asked him:

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<sup>61</sup> SW stands for sight words. This is how Mrs. Taylor levelled books, before *levelled books* were common.

<sup>62</sup> I did not verify with the teacher or the mother how the program worked exactly. What I describe is my understanding of it, from Tiny Tim's telling.

Okay, this is the pocket. I take the card out of the book. I put it in there and then, now you know, and when you get back, Mrs. Little<sup>63</sup> (the parent volunteer) takes it out and puts it back in the book and puts . . . the book back in its colour.

(Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009).

Tiny Tim told me how each book had a card, and when a child took a book home, its card was placed in the child's pocket on the home reading chart (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009). I never saw the children handle the books, as I never was in the classroom at the end of the day when I assumed children chose their books to take home. I do not know how the colour system worked but from Tiny Tim's words, they were associated to each SW level. SW1 was white, SW2 was blue, and the last level was purple (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009). I asked Tiny Tim if the SW1 books were different from the SW2 books.

Tiny Tim:      Actually, they are different.

Sonia:          How are they different?

Tiny Tim:      Okay, they get harder as they go.

Sonia:          Oh, so . . .

Tiny Tim:      The SW1 is very easy, and SW2 is very a little hard, like little, and this is like very hard (he was showing a block, pretending it was a bin with more difficult books).

Sonia:          So, that would be SW3?

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<sup>63</sup> Mrs. Little is a pseudonym.

Tiny Tim: This would be very, very, very hard (showing another pretend bin), and the green one would be like chapters, and they're very, very, very, very hard.

Sonia: They're very hard. Anybody reads those in your class?

Tiny Tim: Actually, no one got to them yet. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009)

It was obvious that Tiny Tim knew about the levels of the books. During a conversation, he told me how he sorted his books at home following the SW model from his class (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009). Levelled books were part of his play through which he made sense of his lived stories. He told me that he sorted his books and labelled them with duct tape on which he wrote SW and a number (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009). I was impressed with how cognizant Tiny Tim was of those levels. When we talked about reading being sometimes difficult, Tiny Tim was excited to tell me that he could read *Scooby-Doo* (Field notes, June 10, 2009). I asked him if *Scooby-Doo* was part of his home reading program. He replied they did not have *Scooby-Doo* for their home reading, but that it would be an SW1 book if it were (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009). By projecting the classification system they had at school onto the books he had at home, Tiny Tim showed his awareness of the system as well as his preoccupation with the different levels.

I found Tiny Tim's knowledge of other children's levels of achievement interesting. I do not know if his appreciation of their achievement was accurate, but in his mind, nobody in his class could read the difficult books yet (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009). That, in itself, was telling. It seemed to me that he paid attention to



what his classmates could read, while referring to a system that differentiated the best readers from the weaker ones. He never told me if some of his classmates could read more challenging books than he could, but I believed he knew some did, given his awareness of the levelled books, and considering Mrs. Taylor's comment about how "some kids will say Brent<sup>64</sup> is a good reader" (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, June 12, 2009). Mrs. Taylor knew the children could tell who the good readers were. I wondered how Tiny Tim made sense of that information. While we talked about the sorting of the books, Tiny Tim said that if they picked the wrong SW book, "Mrs. Taylor would say you picked the wrong one" (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009) and mentioned that his mother would notice if he brought the wrong book home (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009). I wondered what *picking the wrong book* meant to Tiny Tim. Did he understand the connection with his reading skills?

### **Reading with Mom and Dad—Morgan**

At home, Tiny Tim's mother and father both listened to their son read (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009). Mr. Robinson often travelled for work so primarily Tiny Tim's mother helped him with his homework (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009). She supported Tiny Tim with the home reading program. She shared:

I always ask questions like what can we do? These books you're sending home, he still struggles with them a bit. Is there something that we can do? [Mrs. Taylor] had these phonics books. So she said, "I have these really old books, they're not necessarily politically correct, but if you can get over some of the

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<sup>64</sup> Brent is a student in Mrs. Taylor's class.

context, they're great cause they have the same constant sound throughout the whole book, and it just reinforces and reinforces", and that's what we did. And . . . at one point at the end, he said, "Mom, are we done these books?" (She laughs). They're too easy now. He was really happy when he was back to purple with everybody else right . . . but he wasn't ready for purple 'cause he doesn't like the length of the books. And that's all purple does. Right? It's longer books. The shorter ones . . . he prefers, especially with this weather. Outside is much more fun. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009)

Tiny Tim's mother knew the specifics of the home reading program. She participated actively in the classroom activities and was often in a position to consult with Mrs. Taylor when she wanted to know more about how to support her son.

### **About Reading—Tiny Tim**

**Once upon a time . . . favourite books.** Tiny Tim enjoyed books. His parents had read to him since he was a baby (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009). His mother, a book lover, considered herself a model for her sons because she read regularly (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009). One day, Tiny Tim told me about his favourite books. He liked *Fox in Socks*, *Bugs Bunny*<sup>65</sup>, and *Harry Potter* (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009). He mentioned how he liked mystery books, and how well he could read a book containing tongue twisters (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009). I noticed his awareness for the literary language when I asked him to tell me which word he had learned to read first, and he said

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<sup>65</sup> There are many *Bugs Bunny* books. Tiny Tim did not specify which one he meant during our conversation.

“Once upon a time, there lived three little pigs who decided to build their own house” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009). Tiny Tim had considerable knowledge about books, although he could not yet read independently.

**Reading in one’s mind and reading to parents.** Luke was in Grade 3 at the time and unlike Tiny Tim, he did not have to read aloud to his mother anymore (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009; June 18, 2009). Tiny Tim told me his brother could read in his mind (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009). I asked him to explain how that worked.

Tiny Tim: That means he doesn’t say it. He doesn’t say it, so we can’t hear it. He reads in his head like this (He demonstrated how his brother did it, by looking at a book and turning his head).

Sonia: How do you know he is reading?

Tiny Tim: Because he has a book in his hand, and he turns his head looking at the words. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009)

In this transcript excerpt, Tiny Tim showed knowledge about readers. He recognized how readers behaved when they did not read aloud but read in their minds. I asked Tiny Tim if he read in his mind like his brother. He answered, “Hmmm, no, I have to read. Only Grade 1 and Grade 2 have to read. They have to read to your mom and dad” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009). Tiny Tim described his understanding of the reading tasks he had in Grade 1 and Grade 2, and how they further evolved, from watching his brother go through the grades ahead of him. My understanding of Tiny Tim’s comments is that when he read to mom or dad, he read aloud; that was what he had to do in Grade 1 and Grade 2. His brother in Grade 3 did not need to read aloud to his

mother anymore; he read in his mind. Tiny Tim read in his mind as well but only once he was done reading to his mother for the home reading program (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009).

**Reading Harry Potter.** I was intrigued by Tiny Tim's interest in reading books from the Harry Potter series. He said:

I like reading Harry Potter chapter books. . . . And they're like about this big, and 1000 pages. . . . I read them in two nights. . . . The last one is this big. It's 1024 pages, and I read that one in like four nights. . . . I read them mostly on nights. . . . There's the wizards, the Harry Potter phoenix, that's one of them. Harry Potter and the fire. . . . They're the ones I have read so far. . . . And I read them in the morning. I don't really play or watch TV. I usually read. Sometimes I watch TV. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009)

Tiny Tim told me he could read long novels. A week later, he talked about the levelled books again and included the Harry Potter series this time.

Tiny Tim: Remember how I told you about Harry Potter?

Sonia: Uh huh.

Tiny Tim: Books like this one, those are the number 10! . . . Remember the time I told you my brother reads in 9?

Sonia: Yes, I remember that. You told me you do too.

Tiny Tim: I didn't do that a lot (with a soft, disappointed voice). (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 17, 2009)

That day, Tiny Tim was not telling (what I assumed were) pretend stories about what he read. He seemed disappointed when he responded to my comment about him reading

books in level 9 like his brother. Tiny Tim clearly showed interest in the Harry Potter books. He knew many details about the series: they are big, they have many pages, and there is a wizard and a phoenix. The story Tiny Tim told of himself, a reader of the Potter series, showed his interest in the books, even though he acknowledged he could not read them. I imagine Tiny Tim listened to the conversations his brother and mother had about them. I believe he knew how much reading was valued at home and at school.

**Reading big and small words.** In late June, I asked Tiny Tim where he liked to read. His answer was, “Remember, I told you I do not like reading” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny, June 22, 2009). I was a little surprised to hear him say this, as he had never been this clear about not liking to read during our previous conversations. I asked him why he disliked reading. He explained:

Sometimes I like reading if it's big words. If there is many small words, you cannot read that good cause you might need some glasses to see those. . . . I can see, but the doctor said I can't see that good. They said I can't really see that much, so I can't read that much small words. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny, June 22, 2009)

His comments about enjoying reading big words but not a lot of small words showed his awareness of the levels in reading materials once more, and I wondered if it shaped how he constructed himself as a reader. Tiny Tim did not like reading small words because he found them too difficult. When he recalled the doctor saying *he can't see that good* (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny, June 22, 2009), was he trying to justify why he could not read small words?

## **Parenting Tiny Tim—Morgan and Jay**

**Supporting Tiny Tim.** Morgan and Jay Robinson took their sons' education very seriously (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009). Morgan did not want her sons to experience school as she did:

It was very easy if I didn't want to go to school. I didn't have to go kind of thing, right? . . . Of course, I've paid the price for that. . . . I never went to college; I don't have my high school diploma. Those are things that I want for my children.

Hmmm, I want them to succeed. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009)

Morgan seemed to regret not having a high school diploma or a post-secondary education. She and her husband were very involved in their children's education. Morgan often volunteered at the school and regularly spent time in Tiny Tim's class (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009).

Their oldest son, Luke, was successful at school and was in enrichment programs in Language Arts and Mathematics. They hoped that Tiny Tim would follow in Luke's footsteps (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009). Morgan noted that Luke was born in August. He was older than Tiny Tim was when he started school; that seemed to help explain how Luke could read chapter books by the end of Grade 1 (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009). Morgan recalled how Tiny Tim did not know the whole alphabet by the end of Kindergarten, and how she and her husband wondered if their son would be ready for Grade 1 (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009). In retrospect, Jay thought it was the right decision to put Tiny Tim in Grade 1, and shared how his son enjoyed going to school, socialized, had friends, joined

the track team, and experienced growth (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009). They remembered, though, how it was a fight at times to have Tiny Tim read, and how journal writing was difficult (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009). Morgan noted how “At first, it was a real struggle for him, and I think he’d seen that he was further back than most of the kids in his class” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009). The Robinsons supported Tiny Tim as best as they could during his Grade 1 year. Jay mentioned how he tried to help his son by running his finger on the page as they read (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009). He also explained:

We were trying to get [Tiny Tim] to sound out and not look at the pictures, and the teacher, in the interview, said, “No, we want them to look at the pictures and try to associate the pictures”. . . . We did it the other way. I think we frustrated him [a bit] there . . . . It kind of surprised me, right? . . . . You think as an adult . . . if I want to read something, I’m going to sound it out. Don’t look at the picture, sound it out. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009)

To this, Morgan added:

That was our fault, right? . . . I know when Mrs. Taylor tested his reading after Christmas, she had him read. This is when we found out about this . . . the fact that we’re not letting him look at the pictures. So she said, “He’s reading it, and it starts with *p*, and it is purple, a purple flower, and he wasn’t looking at the pictures and guess[ing] that it was purple flower”. And I said, “It’s probably our fault ’cause I remember saying, “Don’t look at the picture, look at the words”,

cause he was sitting looking at the picture, not reading. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009)

The Robinsons explained how they helped and supported their son with his schoolwork. They also thought they were making it more difficult for him to read new words because they hid the illustrations; they eventually changed how they assisted their son after hearing Mrs. Taylor's comment.

**Witnessing frustration.** I asked Morgan, who regularly spent time in the classroom, if there were activities during which she thought Tiny Tim seemed frustrated. She shared the following:

Guess the covered word. [The teacher] covers certain words. They had to read the sentence. And the kids read the sentence out loud, and there would be four or five [children] who would read out loud, and you know he'd be struggling. . . . It wasn't all the time that he was frustrated. It was just when it was something fun . . . 'cause he couldn't catch up. . . . Or [when] they'd have to read in pairs. . . . What he would do as they would get into a group, and he would start reading . . . he couldn't figure [it] out. He would just . . . He'd get quiet. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009)

There were situations in class when Morgan felt her son was frustrated. She described some group activities during which Tiny Tim could not compete with his classmates or had to perform while he felt watched by a partner. Morgan noticed how Tiny Tim did not participate actively in those instances.



**Looking back: Grade 1.** After the summer, Morgan shared with me how she thought Tiny Tim's Grade 1 year had not been easy considering he had problems with some children in his class.

He had some real issues with the kids in his class. He, hmmm, was quite bullied . . . Robert really picked on him . . . He's a year and a half, almost two years older than him . . . He's small right. And he's young . . . He doesn't want to cry in front of his friends but, so when he does it, you know something major's happened.

(Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009)

Morgan seemed quite concerned when she shared these comments with me. Tiny Tim was present while we discussed this issue. He mentioned names of children who punched him, butted, and were rude, as well as children he liked (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Tiny Tim, August 31, 2009). Morgan explained how Tiny Tim missed the first 3½ days of school in Grade 1 because they were on holidays, and how she felt he had missed the initial bonding in the class (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009). She added that there were only two boys from Tiny Tim's Kindergarten class who were with him in Grade 1; "It was really difficult for him, being that he's on the younger side and not knowing a lot [of kids]" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009). I was not aware that Morgan felt her son was bullied in the classroom. I imagine Tiny Tim reported those incidents to his mother. I do not know if she addressed this with the teacher. Morgan referred to Tiny Tim being younger than his classmates were; not only did his age seem to interfere with his reading, but it also affected his relationships with his peers.

**Looking forward: Grade 3 tests.** When I first met the Robinsons, their son Luke was in Grade 3. In Alberta, most children<sup>66</sup> in Grade 3 write standardized tests in English language arts and in mathematics (Alberta Education, 2011). Morgan told me:

Luke is very competitive, and he comes home and he says, “We have to practise achievement tests, and I got 90%, and I was 4th best in the class!” So Tiny Tim listens . . . “When you’ll be in Grade 3, you’ll have to do this”. Tiny Tim says, “No, I don’t want to”. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009)

Tiny Tim’s reaction was clear; he did not want to write tests at which his brother was good, and that his parents valued. I did not sense that Tiny Tim wanted to compete as his brother did.

### **Commenting on Grade 1—Tiny Tim**

Tiny Tim and I chatted about his Grade 1 year; I asked him how it was. He said it was *good*. After I inquired into what was good about it, he shared how he enjoyed doing math, building, and self-selected-reading (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 17, 2009). He added that he liked doing centres where he played with *Marble Works*, building shapes, and building blocks (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 17, 2009). At first, he could not tell me if there was something in Grade 1 that he did not like, but when I asked if there was something he did not like as much, he mentioned science (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 17, 2009).

Sonia:            You did not like science?

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<sup>66</sup> All children in Alberta in Grades 3, 6, and 9 are expected to write the Provincial Achievement Tests unless their parents write a letter to the school principal indicating that their child will not be writing the tests, or if they are exempt for other various reasons (Government of Alberta Education, 2011). [http://education.alberta.ca/media/6419113/05-ach-gib-2011-12\\_administration%20directives,%20guidelines%20&%20procedures.pdf](http://education.alberta.ca/media/6419113/05-ach-gib-2011-12_administration%20directives,%20guidelines%20&%20procedures.pdf)

Tiny Tim: Not that much.

Sonia: Why?

Tiny Tim: Because we had to write! . . . Lots and lots, and I do not like. . .

Sonia: You don't like to write.

Tiny Tim: Uh huh.

Sonia: How do you feel when you write?

Tiny Tim: Sad because I had to do it in one day. . . . And if I didn't do it, I'd have to miss two recesses. . . . Because I have to, like, do lots of writing, and like, this is how big the book is. . . . I had to write all, all, down, down, down, down, to the bottom, until I'm done.

Sonia: So that makes you sad.

Tiny Tim: Yes it does. . . . It is hard sometimes 'cause you don't know. You have to copy off a page, do this and then . . . back to the other page and then more. . . . It hurts my head and my back . . . my neck too.

Sonia: Oh, you must do it for a long time if it hurts you, . . . Does it hurt your hand and your arm?

Tiny Tim: Yes.

Sonia: Does reading make you sad?

Tiny Tim: Hmmm, no, it doesn't. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 17, 2009)

In general, Tiny Tim enjoyed school, but what seemed to discourage him most was writing; it was a long and strenuous task for him (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 17, 2009). Mrs. Taylor and Tiny Tim's parents also noticed how writing was difficult for

him (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, June 12, 2009; Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009). I thought it was remarkable how Tiny Tim could describe his experience of writing, and how embodied it was for him; it hurt his head, his back, and his neck.

### **Teaching Tiny Tim—Mrs. Taylor**

**Being a teacher.** Mrs. Taylor had extensive teaching experience for she had been a teacher for many years when I joined her class in May 2009. At the time, she told me she would be eligible for a full pension in a year (Field notes, June 4, 2009). She shared with me how she came from a teaching family (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, June 12, 2009). She mentioned how she taught different grades for a number of years. She had been back in Grade 1 for a long time now and loved it (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, June 12, 2009).

Mrs. Taylor preferred having books on various topics in her classroom for the children to have a choice in reading material (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, June 12, 2009). With the struggling<sup>67</sup> readers, she controlled their choice of home reading, and Tiny Tim was an example of that<sup>68</sup> (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, June 12, 2009). During self-selected-reading, she made sure all the students had a choice of books they could manage (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, June 12, 2009). On occasion, she also coached parents on how to give their children support when reading at home (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, June 12, 2009). She remarked on a pull-out program the school

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<sup>67</sup> I used the words *struggling readers* with Mrs. Taylor during our conversation because it is a term that I have frequently heard in schools. Even though I try not to use labelling terms, such as *struggling*, I chose to use this one with Mrs. Taylor because I wanted to use a common term for this situation.

<sup>68</sup> Mrs. Taylor sent home books that focused on specific sounds to help children figure them out (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, June 12, 2009).

offered to a few students who received instruction in small groups, from another teacher, four times per week during 15-minute periods but noted that she did not “know how helpful it was” (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, June 12, 2009).

**Being in relation with Morgan.** Having taught at Ramsey Elementary School for so long, Mrs. Taylor knew many families. However, she did not teach Tiny Tim’s brother and only slightly knew his family before she taught him in Grade 1 (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). Soon in the year, she recalled how Morgan told her “that Tiny Tim was young and that maybe he would need a little extra support” (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). Mrs. Taylor also added that Morgan was “really good at making sure that I knew things that might be helpful . . . [Morgan] asked if I would [send key words home] . . . she thought it would be really good for [Tiny Tim]” (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). Mrs. Taylor shared that Morgan was often in the classroom to help, and how they frequently talked about Tiny Tim’s reading; she knew Tiny Tim’s mother was supportive of him (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). According to Mrs. Taylor, reading was hard work for Tiny Tim in Grade 1 (Field notes, June 5, 2009). She hoped she communicated well with Morgan about Tiny Tim’s achievement; she believed him to be “capable, intelligent, and . . . [that it was] just a matter of giving him a little more time” (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). She added that she would tell his Grade 2 teacher that he needed some support to complete tasks in his writing and with reading (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). She shared how she believed that by the end of Grade 3, “He’s [going to] be a really good student. [She] just [had] a good feeling about that . . . He’s serious . . . He’ll achieve and he’ll be fine . . . He’s got a good family, supportive”

(Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). Mrs. Taylor had a close relationship with Morgan because of her regular presence in the classroom. She knew how concerned she was with her son's success in school and appreciated that she inquired into how to help him. Mrs. Taylor was confident that time and family support would contribute to making Tiny Tim a strong student by Grade 3.

### **Reporting on Tiny Tim—Tiny Tim, Mrs. Taylor, Morgan**

**Tiny Tim's account.** Towards the end of June, I asked Tiny Tim how he thought he did in Grade 1. *Pretty good* was how he felt he did and believed his parents thought he did *pretty good* as well (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny, June 22, 2009). I pursued by asking what he was good at. He answered, "I'm good at . . . swimming laps, and I got to the deep end, but I touched the ground . . . in the deep end" (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny, June 22, 2009). Swimming was part of physical education at Ramsey School. Conveniently, there was an outdoor pool across the field from the school. All the students went swimming during the month of June. I told Tiny Tim I would go to the pool to watch him go to the deep end. He responded by saying that he could not go because he did not have the wrist band that confirmed he could swim in the deep end on his own, and that "it [was] a long time ago, I went swimming with that" (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny, June 22, 2009). Tiny Tim had been swimming regularly with his class by the time we had this conversation. After sharing with me that he did well in Grade 1, swimming was the only thing he mentioned when asked about his strengths at school that day. Physical education was part of the program of studies in Grade 1, and that was

something in which Tiny Tim believed he was good in school. A few days later, I asked Tiny Tim how he did in mathematics.

Tiny Tim: I did good.

Sonia: Do you like math?

Tiny Tim: Oh yeah, pretty much. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny, June 25, 2009)

Tiny Tim had no hesitation in telling he did well in mathematics, a subject he enjoyed. He seemed confident about his ability in the area of mathematics; he was good at it and liked doing it.

Before we ended our last conversation in Grade 1, I asked Tiny Tim if he knew what a report card was. I wondered if he knew how his teacher thought he did in school. He did not know what a report card was (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny, June 22, 2009). I explained that it is a piece of paper teachers give to parents to let them know how their children do in school. He did not seem to know what I meant. I was unable to hear his interpretation of Mrs. Taylor's assessment of his performance in Grade 1.

**Mrs. Taylor's account.** Mrs. Taylor was confident Tiny Tim would be fine but felt his Grade 2 teacher needed to give him extra attention (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009).

[I]t's really important that he has a teacher that will accommodate him, and like, I think his feeling about himself as a learner is just a little bit fragile . . . I think he has lots of self-esteem, but he still is developing the confidence in himself as a learner, because he does see himself as struggling. (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009)

Mrs. Taylor did not think it would “be worth [for Tiny Tim to spend] another year in Grade 1” (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009) even though she felt he did not *master* the Grade 1 curriculum (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009).

She added:

What I communicated with [the mother] should reflect that he did achieve a lot . . . There’s work to do . . . It has to do with his age . . . It’s just a matter of giving him a little more time. (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009).

Mrs. Taylor explained that Tiny Tim needed “support to complete tasks . . . in his writing and reading” (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). She estimated that he made the equivalent of:

a year’s worth in progress . . . but [was] not quite where you might want him to be at the beginning of Grade 2. . . . I don’t like assigning numbers . . . but in general terms, I think he [was] about 1.7<sup>69</sup>. (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009).

Mrs. Taylor indicated that Tiny Tim improved the equivalent of a year’s worth during his Grade 1 year. However, even though Tiny Tim progressed as expected, that is, a year’s worth in the course of 1 year, he still was not where he should be, in Mrs. Taylor’s opinion.

**Morgan’s account.** Morgan thought Tiny Tim’s report card was good but was surprised to read that her son needed support in a number of areas; all that was previously brought to her attention was his reading (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009).

Morgan expressed frustration with the language used in the report card:

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<sup>69</sup> 1.7 in relation to level 2, Mrs. Taylor’s expected level for students to reach at the end of the Grade 1 year.



They have demonstrates success, success with support, and all this. . . . I don't understand how they grade things anymore. I don't get it, you know. Like put a number in front of me. Out on a test, he got this many right and this many wrong . . . It's difficult to understand the support, the success, and things like that. It's tough to see what they mean. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009)

Morgan did not know her son needed support to work independently and wondered why she was not made aware of that while she was in the classroom (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009). She added:

[Mrs. Taylor] says, like, he's doing well. She says that he came out at the end reading at grade level . . . where he should be at the end of Grade 1. He wasn't higher, he wasn't lower, he was right where he should be. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009)

The separate conversations I had with Morgan and with Mrs. Taylor showed different interpretations of Tiny Tim's reading level. Even though Mrs. Taylor told me Tiny Tim was not reading at the desired level to enter Grade 2, Morgan heard her say that her son was where he should be. I wondered if Mrs. Taylor decided not to alarm Tiny Tim's parents by saying he was where he should be since he was not far from the expected reading level.

By the end of the year, Morgan felt Tiny Tim preferred to be outside having fun rather than being inside learning. She described her son as an active child who did not like sitting unless he was doing something he enjoyed, like mathematics, a subject in which he had success (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009). She indicated that

he did not like to read and did not want to write stories (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009).

After Grade 2, Tiny Tim's family was planning to move to a different province because of his father's job transfer. Morgan still believed they had done the right thing by putting Tiny Tim in Grade 1 even though he was younger than most of his classmates (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009). She mentioned she might "feel differently in a couple of years . . . and [was not] opposed to them [at the new school] holding him back" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009). She wondered how he would develop in Grade 2, and if he would eventually catch up:

If we start seeing that it's March, April, May before he's getting it, then maybe it's time that he gets held back and gets caught up with the kids his own age technically, right? So we'll see. And there's always a choice to . . . If we do end up moving to Bradford . . . putting him back a year, 'cause we have that option, because of when his birthday is . . . 'Cause in Bradford, it's the calendar year, January to January . . . But because he's already in Grade 2, they can't deny him going into Grade [3]. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009)

Morgan expressed uncertainty about Tiny Tim's prospects in Grade 2 and wondered if he would do well. She also thought about what might happen once they moved to another province where Tiny Tim would likely end up in a class with all children being older than he was.

## Preparing for Grade 2—Tiny Tim

During a conversation with Tiny Tim, I asked him what he did to be ready for Grade 1 and Grade 2.

Sonia: How do you get ready for Grade 1?

Tiny Tim: You need to go to the store and get pencils, and get scissors, get glue . . .

Sonia: And do you have to get ready for Grade 2 now?

Tiny Tim: Yeah!

Sonia: What do you have to do for that?

Tiny Tim: You have to read chapter books if you want to.

Sonia: Okay.

Tiny Tim: They're like, 70 pages and some are 800 pages.

Sonia: Wow!

Tiny Tim: My brother's read 1,000 pages. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 10, 2009)

Almost two weeks later, I asked Tiny Tim if Grade 2 would be easy or difficult. He replied, "more difficult. . . . You know why? . . . We read chapter books" (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny, June 22, 2009). This excerpt speaks of the shift Tiny Tim experienced from transitioning between Grade 1 and Grade 2, and of his home milieu, that reveals his Grade 3 brother's competence in reading. Preparing for Grade 1 appears to have been more play and fun than what Tiny Tim thought he needed to do in preparation for Grade 2. He spoke of needing to learn to read chapter books in Grade 2. His brother read

chapter books at the end of Grade 1 (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 18, 2009).

Luke's successful experiences with reading added a layer to how Tiny Tim might have imagined Grade 2.

### **Summer Reading—Morgan**

Morgan shared Tiny Tim's reaction to the books she bought him for summer reading.

Morgan: I know we had a hard time trying to find books for him to read, and just to keep at home because if you get picture books. They're really big words, they're not the smaller words . . . So I bought the Grade 1 *Summer Reading* pack.<sup>70</sup> Well, it's all chapter books! He looked at it and he goes, "MOM, Luke can have these".

Sonia: Is it like the Junie B. Jones series<sup>71</sup>?

Morgan: Yeah, it's those kinds. It may be easy words, but I think just the context of it being a chapter book scared him . . . "I don't want those right now mom", [he said]. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009)

Morgan was surprised the summer reading pack included exclusively junior chapter books and thought that format scared Tiny Tim. He did not want to read those books and wanted his brother to have them. I wondered why Tiny Tim rejected the books. Did he

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<sup>70</sup> Publishing companies send flyers to schools to give to parents who want to order books for their children. At the end of the year, they suggest collections of books for specific grade levels that are called *Summer Reading* packs.

<sup>71</sup> The Junie B. Jones series is a series of junior chapter books with an average of 70 pages per book.

think it would take too long to read them? Did he feel he might not be able to read those books? Did he just not want to read during the summer?

Just before school started, Morgan mentioned how Tiny Tim told her he was scared there would be more work in Grade 2 (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009).

You probably won't have homework . . . But yes, there's going to be home reading . . . journal writing . . . He hasn't wanted to do anything . . . I asked, why don't you look at those books . . . I buy them every summer and they never touch them . . . Actually, he just wants to have fun. He wants to play. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009)

Morgan tried to help her son be ready for Grade 2 by discussing the work she anticipated he would have to do at home. She also wanted him to keep up with his reading and bought a summer reading pack. However, Tiny Tim did not want to read during the summer; he wanted to play. Morgan believed it would be a challenge for Tiny Tim to adjust to Grade 2 and told him:

You're [going to] have to sit in your desk, and you can't bounce around anymore. You're a big kid now, right? And he's like, "I don't want to be a big kid. I want to go back to playschool" (she laughs). (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009)

In her effort to help Tiny Tim imagine the new school year, Morgan reminded him of some behavioural expectations there might be in his new class. Tiny Tim was not anxious to start school, where he would have to sit at his desk. Instead, he expressed the desire to go back to playschool, where playing was a major part of the curriculum.

In this chapter, I introduced Tiny Tim, his family, his Grade 1 teacher, and shared some of their lived experiences. In the following chapter, I tell Matson's stories, his mother's, and Mrs. Taylor's in a narrative account of his Grade 1 year.

## Chapter Six: Meet Matson—Grade 1

In this narrative account, I recount stories of Matson's experiences in Grade 1, as well as stories his mother and his teacher shared with me during that period.

### **Being Matson—Marie, Matson, Mrs. Taylor, Sonia**

**Being active and enjoying the outdoors.** Matson's light blond hair caught my eye when I first joined the Grade 1 class. Not only was his hair colour noticeable, so was his hairstyle. His bangs were long, and they partly covered his eyes; he had what is called the *skater* hairstyle. Matson talked with interest about a long board skateboard he found in the creek nearby his house (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 18, 2009). He told me he needed to buy wheels before he could ride it, and that he would install them himself with a wrench (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 18, 2009). I was impressed with Matson's assurance in being able to fix his board himself and with his knowledge of the specific tool he planned to use to fix it. Matson enjoyed skateboarding and doing tricks on his BMX bike at the skate park; he was good at it, he thought (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 18, 2009).

Matson liked to play soccer at school and played baseball and basketball at home (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 18, 2009). During the winter, he spent time snowboarding and playing hockey at the creek, where his father cleared snow to make a skating rink (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 18, 2009). He shared that he did not spend much time watching television (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 18, 2009). He spoke of a weekend spent camping with his family, where he saw beaver marks on trees (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 22, 2009) and recalled going fishing with his father

(Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 25, 2009). He planned to ride his bike every day and go on his new trampoline to do back flips during the upcoming summer break

(Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 25, 2009). Matson was an active boy who loved being outside and involved in physical activities. He spent countless hours at the creek behind his house during his free time.

**Loving to draw.** Often during our conversations, Matson drew. He loved to draw. When I started to visit the class in early May, Mrs. Taylor showed me a picture of a big truck that Matson drew; she thought his picture was *amazing* (Field notes, May 12, 2009). A few days later, when she handed out a worksheet on which Matson had to draw a bike, she told him “I’m sure you’ll draw an awesome bike” (Field notes, May 20, 2009). Later in June, I noticed Matson drawing while Mrs. Taylor was teaching; that did not seem to bother her (Field notes, June 16, 2009). I believe she understood his need to draw while he listened. She told me Matson’s father was also good at drawing, and she recalled his visit to the classroom the year Matson’s eldest brother, Austin<sup>72</sup>, was in Grade 1; he came to volunteer for an art class and helped the children draw (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). I wondered if he taught his son how to draw. I found Matson particularly skilled and meticulous when doing art projects in class.

**Not much talking.** Matson was a boy of few words. His mother, Marie, shared with me how her son did not talk much (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009). From my observation in class, Matson watched and listened more than he talked. He did stand up for himself, though, when he did not agree with something and expressed his opinion. The first time I met Matson was the day I started my visits to the classroom, the

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<sup>72</sup>Austin is a pseudonym.



day Mrs. Taylor assessed his reading (Field notes, May 12, 2009). I wondered how my presence next to him while he was assessed influenced our relationship. When I took him to the small room by the library to explain the study and to ask him if he wanted to participate, he seemed uneasy at first (Field notes, June 16, 2009). After I clarified why I asked him to come with me, I sensed he became more comfortable, even though he did not talk much that day (Field notes, June 16, 2009). I wondered if he thought I would be assessing him as well. After clarifying the reason for my being in the classroom and for wanting to speak with him, I offered him to stay and continue talking with me, or if he preferred to go join his classmates in the music class. He chose to go to music but accepted to participate in the study (Field notes, June 16, 2009).

In mid-June, Matson went camping for a week with his grandparents and his brother (Field notes, June 18, 2009). After his return, I asked him if he was anxious for school to be over. He was happy to be back in school, he told me, and wanted it to keep going during the summer because he liked going to school and liked everything there (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 18, 2009). I asked him to name two things he liked in school; he said, “recess and swimming” (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 18, 2009). Wanting to know what he liked to do the most in the classroom, I asked Matson a few specific questions to help him think and remember.

Sonia:        Do you like math?

Matson:      Yes.

Sonia:        Do you like to read?

Matson:      Yes.

Sonia:        Do you like to write?

Matson: Yes.

Sonia: Do you like to draw?

Matson: Yes.

Sonia: Do you like to work with other kids?

Matson: Yes.

Sonia: Do you like to sit and listen?

Matson: Yes.

Sonia: Do you like when Mrs. Taylor reads books?

Matson: Yes.

Sonia: So, you like everything in school?

Matson: Yes. (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 18, 2009)

While Matson answered *yes* to all my questions about what he liked in school, I wondered; did his answers reflect what he thought I wanted to hear? Moore, McArthur, and Noble-Carr (2008) argued that children “might respond with what they think researchers want to hear” (p. 87) and reminded researchers to recognize the possibility of power imbalances when doing research with children. I did not think Matson was completely comfortable interacting with me. This was our first official conversation; he did not know me. Later during that same conversation, Matson told me he did not like to write stories (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 18, 2009). That was only a few minutes after sharing that he liked everything in school, including writing. Our conversation had become more casual and less interview-like, I believed. I thought Matson was warming up to me. We continued to talk. Matson’s answers were often one or two words long. Sometimes, no words would come out of his mouth, only a nod with his head (Transcript,

Sonia & Matson, June 18, 2009). In order for us to keep conversing, I figured I needed to generate ideas for us to discuss and questions to ask him. I understood that Matson was not going to chat for too long. The relationship I tried to develop with him required patience and respect for who he was.

### **About Reading—Matson, Sonia**

**Learning to read.** I asked Matson a number of questions about reading.

Sonia: When did you learn to read?

Matson: Hmmm, when I was in Kindergarten, a little bit.

Sonia: Okay. What did you read in Kindergarten?

Matson: Hmmm, those little books . . .

Sonia: How did you learn to read?

Matson: Hmmm, my mom taught me.

Sonia: Your mom taught you. How did she teach you?

Matson: She read and then we went.

Sonia: Oh, is this what Mrs. Taylor calls *copycat reading*?

Matson: Uh huh.

Sonia: Do you remember the words you read first, or the stories, or signs you read first?

Matson: Hmmm, no.

Sonia: You know when kids drive around with their parents, sometimes they see signs and they can read them. So you don't remember which ones you read first?

Matson: Yes, I do. The *stop* sign and the yellow.

Sonia: The *yield* sign?

Matson: Yes.

Sonia: There's one that says *DQ*.

Matson: D, Dairy Queen. (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 22, 2009)

Matson had clear memories of some experiences he had as he learned to read and was able to talk about them with me. We continued to talk about his reading. I asked Matson if he remembered which book he learned to read first but he could not tell (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 22, 2009). We talked about learning to read at school as well and about Self-Selected-Reading in Mrs. Taylor's classroom. Some of the options with Self-Selected-Reading involved reading with a partner. I asked Matson if he liked reading on his own or with a friend; he said he liked to read on his own (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 22, 2009).

I asked Matson if reading was difficult sometimes; he replied, "When there's big words" (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 22, 2009). I wondered if he found some little words difficult to read, but he told me "no" (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 22, 2009). I asked what he did when he could not read big words; he said he asked the teacher for help (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 22, 2009). I carried on by asking if he could read some big words; he answered, "hmmm, *illustrator*" (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 22, 2009). I found it interesting to hear that a long word he told me he could read was related to what he loved to do—drawing. Matson's conception of *big* and *little* words referred to the length of the words. I believe he judged the difficulty of a text by how

long the words were, which indicated to him whether the text would be easy or difficult to read.

**Aesthetic reading.** When I watched Matson's reading assessment in May, his teacher helped him with words he hesitated to read on his own (Field notes, May 12, 2009). Once he finished reading the book, Mrs. Taylor asked Matson a few questions about the characters, the settings, and what happened at the beginning (Field notes, May 12, 2009). She also asked him what the book made him think of, to which he answered, "*Frog and Toad* because they are nice to each other" (Field notes, May 12, 2009). I was impressed with Matson's answer to his teacher's question. His answer referred to a book Mrs. Taylor had previously read to them that day, in which the characters were nice to each other, just as they were in the book he had just read (Field notes, May 12, 2009). Matson's comment reminded me of Rosenblatt's (1982) idea of *aesthetic reading*<sup>73</sup>, a reading response I valued and believed to be important in the reading process, but that was not always recognized in reading assessments.

**Home reading program.** Matson told me he did not have to read anymore, when I asked him which books he had at home (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 18, 2009). From that comment, I understood that he had completed the home reading program for the year. A few days later, we talked about the program again.

Sonia:            So tell me, when you bring books from school, do you read them  
                         on your own? To your mom? Your dad?

Matson:          I read them to my mom.

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<sup>73</sup> Rosenblatt (1982) spoke of aesthetic reading, a transaction between the reader and a text, during which the reader's attention is on what is being lived and experienced from reading that text.

Sonia: How does it go, like, you read it to her, or she reads it to you?

Matson: I read it by myself. (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 22, 2009)

As for which books he took home, Matson could not remember, nor did he refer to the sorting system that levelled the books (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 22, 2009).

Matson said he had to read at home, for school, but that was all he mentioned about it (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 22, 2009).

I asked Matson what kinds of books he liked to read; he told me he liked any kinds, but not cartoons (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 22, 2009). I wanted to know where he read, when he was on his own. He told me in his bedroom (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 22, 2009). I asked Matson if he read to his little sister; *yeah*, he answered (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 22, 2009). Did he like to read to her, I wondered. He did but added he did not like her reading to him because she did not know how to read yet (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 22, 2009).

During our conversation around reading and books, Matson told me he read in his bed, but later, when I asked him if he read every night in his bed, his answer was that he did not read anymore; it was *a long time ago* that he did (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 22, 2009). I learned from Matson that he drew in his bed instead of reading; it made him tired (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 22, 2009). I did not know if Matson still read in bed. I was confused with some of his comments. The following exchange shows more confusing moments for me.

Sonia: Do you have lots of books in your house?

Matson: Yes.

Sonia: Are they in your bedroom?

Matson: Yes.

Sonia: So, tell me one book you have in your bedroom.

Matson: Hmm, I gave them away so I don't know. (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 22, 2009)

I noticed ambivalence in Matson's words. When he spoke in general terms about reading, books, or school, he often gave *right* answers, and by that, I mean answers that teachers and adults would most likely want to hear (Moore, McArthur, and Noble-Carr, 2008). In contrast, when asked to comment on some specific details, his answers sometimes contradicted his previous ones. I was puzzled. I wondered if this was Matson's way of expressing his awareness of the expectations he might have felt put on him as a young student. Did he tell me what he thought he should be doing, or what I wanted to hear? When unable to elaborate on specific details, did he answer in a way that would allow him to avoid the topic? When Mrs. Taylor assessed Matson's reading on my first day in the classroom, she asked him if he liked to be read to, or if he liked to read himself (Field notes, May 12, 2009). Matson answered, "I like reading, I do good" (Field notes, May 12, 2009). Did he give his teacher the answer he believed was the right one?

### **Parenting Matson—Marie**

**Juggling a busy household.** Matson's mother, Marie, worked part-time as a nurse while she ran a busy household with four children, aged twelve and under (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009). Her husband, a carpenter, worked long hours; Marie's biggest concern seemed to be the lack of time (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009). She found homework frustrating; it was a challenge for her to have the

children bathed, to make lunches for the next day, and to have all the books read (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009). Occasionally, her husband helped with the younger children's reading, but sometimes, he became frustrated with how they read and would take over the reading, Marie told me (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, August 26, 2009). When her older two sons were old enough, she asked them to read to their younger siblings or listen to them read; she felt that worked out well (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009). Managing the schedule of the whole family kept Marie very busy.

**Home reading.** Marie recalled when Matson was in Kindergarten, he liked books, and it was expected of her to read to him (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009). At first, in Grade 1, when her son brought books home, Marie read them to him; she forgot he was supposed to read to her, until she received a note from Mrs. Taylor telling her that "Matson was really behind in reading . . . he should be reading [the books]" (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009). Following that conversation, Marie tried to have Matson read to her.

We started to try to make him read; it was a struggle. Because he was behind . . . he'd get mad and throw the book down or go, "I don't want to read! I don't want to read!" I would say, "You can read one [page], and I will read one". That worked better . . . It just went really, really slow. (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009)

Marie mentioned she *had messed up* when she explained how she had been reading to Matson instead of him reading to her but remarked that he "never had the urge to really try" (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009). When she had him read to her, she noticed that he would give up easily and felt frustrated; he did not want to read



(Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009). At one point, Mrs. Taylor sent key words home for Matson to practise reading; Marie recounted how her husband was persistent in working with their son, and how Matson seemed to be more willing to read books once he had learned to read the key words (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009). Marie was happy to say that her son liked “to read all the time now” (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009). She added that during his camping trip with his grandparents, he read the junior Bible to his grandmother who “was surprised how good he could read” (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009).

**Matson’s worries.** After Marie and I talked about Matson’s home reading, she told me her son worried about failing Grade 1.

For a while he’d say, “I’m failing at school . . . I’m failing. I will have to do Grade 1 again” . . . He said that, even up to lately. I don’t know where he’s getting that . . . I think he has a perception that he’s failing, and I can’t get it out of him . . . I don’t know if he feels he’s behind the other kids. I don’t know where he sits in there, but he comes with this idea. I did tell him, “Why do you think that?”, and he didn’t know. . . . He knows what the other kids do. (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009)

Matson’s mother had seen improvement with her son’s reading and was puzzled to hear him say he thought he was failing at school. She did not know how he came up with this idea. I wondered if Matson heard his teacher tell his mother that he was *really behind*. Did his mother discuss Mrs. Taylor’s comment with him or in his presence? How did Matson perceive his father’s persistent involvement with him? Did he sense that something was *wrong*? Marie was not comfortable knowing her son thought he was

failing. She did not know how well he did in comparison to the other children in the class and wondered if he felt he was not as good as his classmates.

I thought Marie would have shared Matson's comments about failing school with Mrs. Taylor, but she did not. Marie had known Mrs. Taylor for a number of years; she taught her two older sons and hoped that her daughter Monica<sup>74</sup> would have her as a teacher as well (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009). Marie told me she felt comfortable going to the school to talk with teachers and administrators when she needed to do so (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009). Considering that, I wondered why she did not talk to Mrs. Taylor about Matson's worries. What would Mrs. Taylor's response have been, if Marie had shared Matson's comment with her?

### **Commenting on Grade 1—Matson**

Matson thought his Grade 1 year had been *good*, when I asked him to comment on it (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 18, 2009). To help him explain what made his year good, I asked him if he did something that was *awesome*. He promptly answered, "gym" (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 18, 2009). He recalled enjoying an obstacle course that Mr. B., the physical education teacher, set up for the students, when I asked him what he did in the gym (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 18, 2009).

I continued to ask questions. Did he like the ducklings in his class? He nodded (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 18, 2009). Was there something he did not like? Matson answered, "Nothing" (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 18, 2009). I was surprised to hear him say *nothing* since that same day, he talked about how he did not like

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<sup>74</sup>Monica is a pseudonym.

to write stories (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 18, 2009). I tried to know more about his writing.

Sonia: What is it that you don't like about writing stories?

Matson: It takes me too long.

Sonia: What takes you too long? . . . Is it the writing? Is it finding ideas?

Matson: Finding the ideas . . . (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 18, 2009)

Earlier in May, Mrs. Taylor had engaged in a conversation with the children about fairy tales and the different parts of a story (Field notes, May 19, 2009). She also gave her students a worksheet and asked them to find ideas for a story (Field notes, May 19, 2009). She helped Matson begin his work and moved on to help another student (Field notes, May 19, 2009). After Mrs. Taylor left him, Matson spent the rest of the writing period drawing pictures (Field notes, May 19, 2009). I helped him complete his worksheet the following day (Field notes, May 20, 2009). Later, in June, Matson wrote in his journal about his long board skateboard and did not require help at all (Field notes, June 3, 2009). He seemed comfortable writing about something he liked to do. I tried to help him write a story, a couple of weeks later, offering possible ideas but found him unreceptive (Field notes, June 17, 2009). After I left that day, the class went to the pool to swim (Field notes, June 18, 2009). Matson told me he did not have his bathing suit and ended up writing his story (Field notes, June 18, 2009). He did not say more about having to write at the pool. I could see he was not thrilled to have to write the story. He needed a lot of encouragement to finish it.

## Teaching Matson—Mrs. Taylor

Mrs. Taylor thought Matson was *very creative* (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). She remembered how he enjoyed the science unit on colours because they did many experiments; “He could tell you everything [about it] . . . He was interested in it, and he was paying attention to it” (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). Before the school year started, Mrs. Taylor had a conversation with Matson’s Kindergarten teacher who shared with her a few comments about Matson:

[He was a] pretty good little guy. Hmmm, needed to be encouraged a lot, was not totally keen about school and working, hmmm, but . . . His Kindergarten teacher felt that he was capable and would fall nicely within the average range and be able to achieve the goals in Grade 1, sort of your expected outcomes. (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009)

Mrs. Taylor “was quite comfortable that [Matson] was going to have a good year” (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). Having taught Matson’s two older brothers, she knew the family quite well.

When I joined the class in May, Mrs. Taylor expressed concerns with Matson’s behaviour in the classroom; it seemed to be a problem at times (Field notes, June 3, 2009). She asked me if I remembered “him being kind of silly . . . [she would] say something, and he would repeat it” (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). I told her that from the back of the room, I did not hear his voice (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009).

Mrs. Taylor worried about Matson moving on to Grade 2, into a class with a more *traditional approach*, where, she believed, students sat at their desks and did the same work at the same time (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). She thought that in such environment, he might not like school, but on the other hand, maybe that was what he needed, she remarked (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). Mrs. Taylor was concerned about Matson but was not sure which teaching style would suit him best.

### **Reporting on Matson—Matson, Marie, Mrs. Taylor**

**Matson's account.** When I first asked Matson if he knew what a report card was, he replied, "I don't know what it is" (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 25, 2009). After I explained that it was a piece of paper on which teachers write about each student, he seemed to be familiar with the concept, even though he could not tell me what was in it (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). I told him teachers give report cards to parents to let them know how their children do in school (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 25, 2009). I asked what he thought would be on his report card, but he did not know (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 25, 2009). I carried on and asked more questions.

Sonia: Do you think it's going to say Matson is a great swimmer?

Matson: No.

Sonia: No, because swimming is part of Phys. Ed.

Matson: Is that gym?

Sonia: Yes. And swimming is part of Phys. Ed. . . . Do you think Mrs. Taylor [will write] you're good in math?

Matson: No.

Sonia: No, you're not good in math? You're not? I thought you were.

Matson: I am not.

Sonia: Why do you say that?

Matson: I don't know.

Sonia: You think you're not good in math. Is it difficult for you?

Matson: No.

Sonia: Why do you say you're not [good]? . . .

Matson: I go slow doing it.

Sonia: You go slow doing it. What do you do slow?

Matson: Math.

Sonia: Like adding things? And do you count on your fingers?

Matson: No. I count in my head. (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 25, 2009)

I continued and asked Matson if he was good in science, in reading, in writing, and in arts. He nodded, meaning *yes*; he was good in those subjects (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 25, 2009).

I found it puzzling how Matson told me he was not good in mathematics although he did not find it difficult. I wondered if he had done math activities that he was unable to complete in the given time. I am familiar with a math activity called *Mad Minutes*. In Grade 1, it requires students to complete a worksheet of addition and/or subtraction questions in a set period of time. I imagine such an activity would be daunting for a child who considers himself slower than his peers in mental computation. However, Mad

Minutes was not an activity Mrs. Taylor's students did in her class. I wondered how Matson came to think he was too slow to be good in mathematics.

**Marie's account.** The last time I met with Marie before Matson went to Grade 2 was in late August. I revisited the issue of failing with her.

Sonia: I remember hearing from you that [Matson] was worried he might fail.

Marie: I was telling him, how did you get this idea? He was shocked (to pass Grade 1).

Sonia: Did you find out why he thought that?

Marie: No . . . I just think he thought because he'd had trouble with his reading. That's kind of the impression I got. "I didn't do good". That's what he said. "I didn't do good". He struggled a bit with reading, right? I don't know if he is like my husband, so he'd be a perfectionist. Maybe he figured he didn't do it perfect. . . . He was just really shocked. He's happy. (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, August 26, 2009)

According to Matson's mother, her son was surprised to see he passed Grade 1. He was reassured when he learned about his promotion to Grade 2. Marie still did not know why her son thought he would fail.

I asked Marie if anything surprised her about Matson's report card. She thought, "He didn't do too bad, kind of where I thought he would be" (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, August 26, 2009). Marie did not seem to be concerned about Matson's performance in Grade 1. Her two older sons had experienced big challenges in school. She explained to

me that Austin, her eldest son, was *ADHD*, and Bradley<sup>75</sup>, the second oldest, had surgery when he was younger and was dealing with a *learning disability* (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009). Matson did not have health issues and aside from hearing that he was behind in reading in the fall, Marie did not appear to have any other concerns with his academic abilities (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009).

**Mrs. Taylor’s account.** Following Matson’s reading assessment in May, Mrs. Taylor was happy with the *way he read* (Field notes, May 12, 2009). She thought his reading comprehension was *okay* but thought he “did not predict much” (Field notes, May 12, 2009). Later in August, Mrs. Taylor said:

His reading, it just didn’t come along and develop the fluency and the confidence that I was hoping. . . . The reality is that Matson . . . [is] struggling, I guess. I don’t like to use words like, *struggling*, because it makes it sound like it’s so hard, but [he’s] not achieving where you’d want [him] to be, to easily say to [his] parents [he’s] okay or above average; everything is great. . . . You’re going to have to work on this. (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009)

Mrs. Taylor did not think Matson was reading at the *expected* level for the end of Grade 1 and was concerned about his Grade 2 school year (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). She also recalled how, in the fall, it took a while for his home reading routine to be set (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009).

## **Preparing for Grade 2—Matson**

I asked Matson in June how he thought Grade 2 would be.

Sonia:            You’re going to be in Grade 2. What do you think of that?

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<sup>75</sup> Bradley is a pseudonym.



Matson: Good.

Sonia: Do you think it's going to be fun in Grade 2?

Matson: Uh huh.

Sonia: What do you think you'll do?

Matson: Hmm, math, art.

Sonia: Do you think you'll draw again in Grade 2?

Matson: (He nodded.)

Sonia: So, what do you look forward to in Grade 2?

Matson: Drawing. (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 22, 2009)

Matson only briefly answered my questions. He did not tell me much about how he imagined what Grade 2 would be like, besides anticipating drawing, something he did well and loved. Just before school started, Marie mentioned that Matson told her he was scared Grade 2 would be hard, and he worried about homework (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, August 26, 2009). Marie wondered what would happen in Grade 2; she “worried about the teacher. . . . and his reading a little bit too” (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, August 26, 2009), when I asked what concerned her. She heard from other parents that one Grade 2 teacher was demanding with the children and pushed them to work hard, while her friends’ children “did not learn anything” with another one (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, August 26, 2009). Marie worried either way and did not look forward to her son having a lot of homework (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, August 26, 2009), something that she found difficult to handle, considering she had four children and felt there was not enough time to do everything.

I introduced Matson and his mother alongside Mrs. Taylor in this narrative account of his experiences in Grade 1. In the next chapter, I describe my entry into Mrs. Henry's class, as I followed Tiny Tim and Matson into Grade 2.

## **Chapter Seven: Grade 2—Re-entering the Field**

In Chapters Five and Six, I shared Tiny Tim's and Matson's Grade 1 narrative accounts. I pursued my research by following both boys into Grade 2. In this chapter, I describe my entry into Mrs. Henry's Grade 2 class.

### **Connecting with Mrs. Henry**

When I first visited the school in early May, I told the principal my research design required that I follow the two student-participants when they moved up to Grade 2, and if possible, the two students needed to be in the same class (Field notes, May 12, 2009) as Ramsey Elementary School had three classes in most grade levels. The principal did not seem to think it was a problem to put the two boys in the same class (Field notes, May 12, 2009). After Mrs. Taylor and I identified the participants in early June, she reiterated that the principal would keep the two boys together in Grade 2 (Field notes, June 4, 2009). In mid-June, I met the principal in the hallway and asked if he knew who would teach Tiny Tim and Matson; he told me Mrs. Henry would (Field notes, June 16, 2009).

During the last week of school, Mrs. Henry dropped by Mrs. Taylor's room to meet me (Field notes, June 22, 2009). Later that day, I went to her classroom to talk with her (Field notes, June 22, 2009). I explained my research, my reasons for doing it, my experience with Annie, and that I would not be in a position to discipline the students, considering my research methodology (Field notes, June 22, 2009). I emphasised that I was studying children's experiences and was not in the classroom to teach anyone, after she remarked that she could learn from me (Field notes, June 22, 2009). She asked me

how I picked the boys. She mentioned that she was a *traditional* teacher (Field notes, June 22, 2009). I gave her examples of questions or topics I would likely discuss with her and offered to come and help set up her classroom in September, if that was something she wanted (Field notes, June 22, 2009). Before I left her classroom, I asked for her phone number and said I would contact her in July to go for coffee (Field notes, June 22, 2009).

From the conversations I had with Mrs. Taylor about who would teach the boys in Grade 2, I believed Mrs. Henry was chosen because the other second grade teachers were assigned students with special needs, and also, because one of the teachers was new to the school and would need time to adjust (Field notes, June 22, 2009). I never checked with Mrs. Henry if she felt pressured to take me, but I imagined she did. In her late sixties, she was of the age of retiring. I understood from Mrs. Taylor that Mrs. Henry preferred to work on her own (Field notes, June 22, 2009). I worried she might not want me in her class; we did not know each other after all and having another adult in the classroom can be unsettling. Later in August, Mrs. Taylor shared with me how “There might have been a bit of pressure” (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009) on Mrs. Henry to take me. She recalled how she explained to Mrs. Henry that “[I was] interested in [the] boys and [in] talking with her about their reading; [I was] not there to evaluate her” (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). I asked if Mrs. Henry would have said no to having me, if she really did not want me in her class. Mrs. Taylor said, “She could have said no . . . and she would have said no” (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). I was grateful Mrs. Henry agreed to have me in her class; however, I believed she did not volunteer to participate. I think she accepted upon being

asked to do so. I remembered a conversation with the principal earlier in June when I learned that Mrs. Henry would teach the boys the following September (Field notes, June 16, 2009). I told him I wanted to meet her before the school year ended to which he responded he would talk to her (Field notes, June 16, 2009). From the principal's response, I understood Mrs. Henry was not aware I was coming to her class and thought my presence in her classroom might not be what she wanted; these things worried me. Narrative inquirers foreground relationships with their co-researchers<sup>76</sup>. From what I understood of how Mrs. Henry was chosen to be the boys' Grade 2 teacher, I expected to have to work carefully on developing my relationship with Mrs. Henry but believed we would find a way forward.

Planning to move on with the boys made me look back at the two months I spent in Mrs. Taylor's room. I enjoyed coming alongside the children and their teacher. I found their classroom a pleasant place to be. I was excited to have the opportunity to carry on to the next phase of my study but felt nostalgic at the idea of leaving the group of children I had come to know and appreciate, and for ending my time in Mrs. Taylor's classroom. I was looking forward to continue conversations with Tiny Tim, Matson, and their families. However, I was a little nervous about entering another environment and developing relationships with a new group of children and their teacher.

As intended, I met Mrs. Henry at a coffee shop one day in July. We had a casual conversation during which we talked about our families and the holidays (Field notes, July 17, 2009). In preparation for the next school year, I asked Mrs. Henry when would be a good time for me to join her class. She indicated that she wanted to have a full week

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<sup>76</sup> Participants are considered to be co-researchers by narrative inquirers.

alone with her students in September; my first day in her class was set for Monday after Labour Day, almost two weeks after the children returned to school (Field notes, July 17, 2009).

At the end of August, I joined Mrs. Henry in her classroom to help set up for the children's arrival (Field notes, August 31, 2009). While I was helping with nametags, we talked. Mrs. Henry shared information about Anna<sup>77</sup>, a student who *worried* her; she had a conversation with Anna's mother and was happy to see she was involved (Field notes, August 31, 2009). She also talked about her husband's health concerns and a flood that damaged their basement (Field notes, August 31, 2009). Two days later, I returned to help Mrs. Henry after the children had left; it was their first day of school. We sorted the children's school supplies, organized the classroom some more, and had another conversation (Field notes, September 2, 2009). Mrs. Henry talked about her new students; Anna was *good*; Matson *pushed* all day; and Tiny Tim was *very quiet* (Field notes, September 2, 2009). She shared that her principal asked teachers to write a blog for their class and wondered if I had used one before (Field notes, September 2, 2009). Unfortunately, I had no experience with writing a blog. I left her class that day, anxious to come back and meet the children.

## **Early Experiences in the Classroom**

**First day in the classroom—September 14, 2009.** I walked into the Grade 2 classroom and located Matson and Tiny Tim immediately. They both smiled at me (Field notes, September 14, 2009). I was happy to see them again, as well as the few children I knew from Grade 1. I briefly introduced myself; no questions were asked (Field notes,

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<sup>77</sup> The participants' Grade 2 classmates' names are pseudonyms.

September 14, 2009). The children were quietly sitting at their desks when their teacher announced it was time to read silently (Field notes, September 14, 2009). Following the reading period, the children started to write the CAT4<sup>78</sup>, a test Mrs. Henry indicated was made compulsory by the school district (Field notes, September 14, 2009). After the allotted time, the tests were put away, and to be continued later. Writing, reading, and math activities followed (Field notes, September 14, 2009). I left the classroom while the children sat at their desks to eat their lunch, under Mrs. Henry's supervision (Field notes, September 14, 2009).

**Second day in the classroom—September 16, 2009.** I was a few minutes late when I arrived at the school. I went to the classroom and found it empty. I remembered there was a school assembly that morning. I joined the class in the meeting room, a large classroom with built-in seating, arranged in a half-circle shape. There was space for me to sit next to Nicky, a small girl from Mrs. Henry's class, who laced her arm around mine as soon as I sat down (Field notes, September 16, 2009). She made me feel included. It was important that I developed relationships with all the children.

Back in the classroom, the children continued the CAT4. I noticed a few students who seemed to have difficulty writing the test; Mrs. Henry caught some of them looking at their neighbour's copy and told them not to do so (Field notes, September 16, 2009). The children were very quiet during the thirty minutes they spent writing the test, even though some of them could not read all the questions on their own and were not allowed to ask for help (Field notes, September 16, 2009). Mrs. Henry wanted her students to

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<sup>78</sup> CAT4 stands for *Canadian Achievement Test, 4<sup>th</sup> edition*. Mrs. Henry explained that the test served to assess Grade 2 children's reading and arithmetic skills (Field notes, September 14, 2009).

work hard because the test had to be sent for marking in a few days. There was a PD day during the week; there was not much time left to complete it (Field notes, September 16, 2009).

Following the test, the students welcomed the recess break and their *gym*<sup>79</sup> period (Field notes, September 16, 2009). The morning ended. Before I left, Mrs. Henry and I worked on her blog (Field notes, September 16, 2009); we were learning together how to blog. I believe that contributed to developing my relationship with Mrs. Henry.

**Third day in the classroom—September 21, 2009.** The morning started with silent reading. The students each picked one book from one of four baskets and were to read that book during the reading period (Field notes, September 21, 2009). Later, Mrs. Henry introduced the list of new words the children had to learn to spell over the week (Field notes, September 21, 2009). Following a discussion about the phonics in the words and on not to reverse *b* and *d*, the children copied each word three times in their *spelling duo-tang* (Field notes, September 21, 2009). Mrs. Henry told me the students should know how to spell the words once they copied them three times (Field notes, September 21, 2009).

During the writing activity, I noticed Mrs. Henry sharpened some children's pencils; a child told me the students were not allowed to sharpen pencils in their class (Field notes, September 21, 2009). Sitting at the back of the room, I heard Mrs. Henry talk to Matson because he was making noise; she told him to stop the noise (Field notes, September 21, 2009). I quickly learned that Mrs. Henry liked a quiet and orderly class.

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<sup>79</sup> The children and the teacher all referred to *gym*, when they talked about the physical education period, a subject matter taught by Mr. B., the *gym teacher*.



I went outside at recess and talked to Matson. He was hanging out with his friend, Brent, from Grade 1 (Field notes, September 21, 2009). Tiny Tim was busy playing at the playground with his toy (Field notes, September 21, 2009). After recess, the children engaged in more literacy activities and in a pattern exercise (math); they worked on their pattern assignment for a while. Mrs. Henry eventually announced that the first team to be done the assignment would receive *party points*. I learned from Tiny Tim's mother that the students in Mrs. Henry's class belonged to one of four teams to which the teacher gave party points whenever she wanted to reward them; once they cumulated a certain number of points, the team members received a candy (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009).

The morning ended and the children left the classroom to go wash their hands. Mrs. Henry's classroom was in a portable, a building physically detached from the school building. When the children went to the gymnasium, to the music or computer rooms, or anywhere else in the school, they had to go outside and walk fifteen meters to enter the school. That was where they went to wash their hands. Before I left the classroom, I gave Mrs. Henry a consent form; I asked her to read it and see if she had questions. She told me "as long as I don't have to do something on the computer" (Field notes, September 21, 2009). I sensed that Mrs. Henry was not very comfortable with computer technology. I also mentioned I could bring the assent forms for the children to sign during my next visit. We discussed when I could take the boys to have conversations. Mrs. Henry suggested I take them during class so "they don't miss recess" (Field notes, September 21, 2009). I suggested taking them at lunch; she seemed to like the idea (Field notes, September 21, 2009). I packed my things and headed out the door at the same time

as Matson and some classmates; they were going to train for the track meet that was coming up (Field notes, September 21, 2009).

**Remaining of September 2009 in the classroom.** One morning, I went over an information letter about the study with the children and explained the assent form to them; they all signed it and took home a letter and consent form for their parents (Field notes, September 23, 2009). Later that day, Mrs. Henry and I went to the staffroom to have coffee. She mentioned she liked a quiet classroom (Field notes, September 23, 2009). Mrs. Henry seemed to feel comfortable chatting with me about her students, something I appreciated. She talked about Jack's mother, who, during *Meet the Teacher Night*, told her that her son was bullied the previous year (Field notes, September 23, 2009); she mentioned she found Haden did not have the best manners (Field notes, September 30, 2009); and she shared how mad she was that Shelby told her parents her teacher cut her sleeve when it was not true (Field notes, September 30, 2009). I thought our relationship was developing well, and Mrs. Henry appeared supportive of my study the day she told me she would remind the children to bring back their parents' consent forms, and how it was *too bad* Paula's parents did not consent for their daughter to participate (Field notes, September 25, 2009). I felt her comments spoke of how comfortable she was, having me in her classroom. I asked Mrs. Henry one morning if she would like me to help the children, and if there was someone in particular who needed attention; she told me to help anybody, at any time, especially Tara (Field notes, September 28, 2009). I was pleased to hear I could contribute by helping children when needed.

My relationships with the children seemed to be evolving positively. Shelby confided in me about troubles with a boy in the class (Field notes, September 28, 2009); Kiera and Nicky hugged me as I tried to leave at lunch and said, “You can’t leave” (Field notes, September 23, 2009); Anna wondered how long I would stay and said, “I don’t want you to leave” (Field notes, September 25, 2009). I was relieved to see the children wanted me to stay. Even though my study focused on Matson and Tiny Tim, I wanted the other children in the class to feel I was there for them too, that I could help them and listen to them while I was in the classroom.

By the end of the month, I was ready to start the conversations with Matson and Tiny Tim again. I asked Mrs. Henry if I could take Tiny Tim one day at lunch, and she agreed (Field notes, September 28, 2009). I took Tiny Tim upstairs by the library to talk while he ate his lunch, but that did not work well; talking to me prevented him from eating and being ready to go out for recess on time (Field notes, September 28, 2009). When I shared with Mrs. Henry how it did not work well, she suggested I take the boys during class time; she did not worry about Matson because he did his work and said Tiny Tim was okay too (Field notes, September 30, 2009). I was thankful that Mrs. Henry supported the work I wanted to do.

**Class routine around literacy activities.** Most mornings in Mrs. Henry’s classroom started with silent reading. The period usually lasted around fifteen minutes. The children had to pick one book from the basket assigned to their team<sup>80</sup>. In these four baskets, Mrs. Henry said she put a variety of books (Field notes, October 21, 2009). She wanted the children to learn to pick the right level of books and consequently did not

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<sup>80</sup> I believe those teams were the same teams to which Mrs. Henry awarded party points.

allow them to pick more books during the reading period; if they were done reading the book they chose, they had to wait (Field notes, October 21, 2009). She indicated to the students, however, that if the book they chose was too difficult, they could change it (Field notes, September 14, 2009). Mrs. Henry also mentioned to me that she had a collection of levelled books from the library (Field notes, October 21, 2009). During the silent reading period, I often read with a child; Tiny Tim and Nicky regularly asked me to read with them (Field notes, November 4, 9, 18, 25, 2009; field notes, December 2, 3, 7, 9, 11, 16, 2009; field notes, January 4, 6, 2010). Mrs. Henry attended to a number of students and listened to them read to her (Field notes, September 14, 23, 2009; field notes, October 5, 9, 21, 2009; field notes, November 6, 2009); as I learned about them, I came to understand those students were *weaker* readers in the class.

Every Monday morning after silent reading, Mrs. Henry wrote a list of ten words on the board that the children had to study for the spelling test at the end of the week (Field notes, September 2009—February 2010). She often emphasized phonics to help her students learn the words; she asked questions about their meaning and spoke about *families of words*, and *jail words* (Field notes, September 21, 28, 2009; field notes, October 19, 26, 2009; field notes, November 16, 2009; field notes, December 7, 18, 2009; field notes, January 4, 11, 2010). Following the discussion about the new words, the children copied each word three times in their spelling duo-tang (Field notes, September—February 2009/10). Mrs. Henry checked her students' work and gave stickers to who finished on time and printed well (Field notes, September 2009—February 2010).

For the reading program, Mrs. Henry used a series of readers that included three short stories each (Field notes, September 21, 2009). When introducing a new story, she brought children's attention to the pictures and asked questions about the topic covered in the story (Field notes, September 21, 2009). Following the introduction, the children listened to the story on an audio tape and had to follow in their book with a finger; after that, along with the tape, they read the story aloud (Field notes, September 21, 2009). From these stories, Mrs. Henry engaged her students in worksheet activities requiring children to read, write, match, classify, cut, glue, etc. (Field notes, September 2009—February, 2010). She also chose ten words from each story, wrote them on the board and sent the list home for the children to learn to read (Field notes, September 2009—February, 2010). To help the children learn those words, Mrs. Henry and the children played a game called *The Smarties Game*. During that game, levelled<sup>81</sup> groups of children took turns to play (Field notes, September 23, 2009). Mrs. Henry put the game board on the floor while a group of children gathered around it; she placed one Smartie<sup>82</sup> in every empty space on the board and put down a pile of cards with words (Field notes, September 23, 2009). The children each took a turn to pick a card and read the word<sup>83</sup>. If the child read the word, he/she took a Smartie, but if unable to read the word, the child could not take a Smartie. It was then, the following student's turn to try to read the word on the card (Field notes, September 23, 2009).

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<sup>81</sup> The groups, made by Mrs. Henry, separated the children according to their reading skill levels: *weaker*, *middle*, and *strong* (Field notes, September 23, 2009). Mrs. Henry knew other teachers did not agree with such grouping of children, but she found that when all students were together, the stronger ones always answered while the weaker ones did not. She believed children received more attention if grouped by reading proficiency (Field notes, September 23, 2009).

<sup>82</sup> Smarties are sugar-coated chocolate candies very popular with children. They come in various colours.

<sup>83</sup> The words written on the cards were from the list of words from the stories the class read in the readers.

Mrs. Henry knew her students loved Smarties. She rewarded them with such candies in another game called *The Word Wall Game* during which she picked a word from the class word wall words<sup>84</sup> that were up on the wall, behind the students' desks. Without telling her students which word she picked, she traced the shape of the word on the board at the front of the class; the children had to guess which word it was and write it in their *spelling book* (Field notes, September 30, 2009). Mrs. Henry went around to check the answers and gave a Smartie to the children who guessed right (Field notes, September 30, 2009). For the remainder of the game, she gave three more clues to help children guess the word, but no more Smarties were given after the first clue (Field notes, November 25, 2009). Mrs. Henry tried to give her students different strategies for reading and wanted them to realize "that we also learn by seeing the shape of a word" (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, October 28, 2009).

During their weekly visit to the library, Tiny Tim's mother told me the students picked three books for their home reading program, but they could also read books from home or from the public library (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October 9, 2009). I never saw the letter Mrs. Henry gave the parents about the home reading program, but I assumed the parents were asked to listen to their child read and record the title of the books that were read. It is also my understanding that once the recording sheet was full of book titles, the children brought it back to the teacher and received a prize.

Children in Mrs. Henry's class wrote once a week in their journal about a topic chosen by their teacher (Field notes, September 21, 2009). Mrs. Henry often reminded

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<sup>84</sup> Word wall words consisted of a number of short words permanently displayed in the classroom in an alphabetical order. The students were expected to always spell these words correctly since they were easily accessible.

her students to write the date, write on the lines, and to skip a line; when they were done writing, volunteer students went to the front of the room to read their pieces to the class (Field notes, November 2, 2009). During my time in the classroom, the children also wrote a story on a topic assigned by the teacher (Field notes, October 5, 2009).

In this chapter, I described my entry into Mrs. Henry's Grade 2 class. In Chapters Eight and Nine, I share Tiny Tim's and Matson's narrative accounts in Grade 2.

## Chapter Eight: Tiny Tim in Grade 2<sup>85</sup>

In this narrative account, I share Tiny Tim's experiences in Grade 2, and, as I did with his Grade 1 narrative account, I intertwined his parents' and teacher's stories with his.

### First Week of School—Morgan and Jay

When I met Mrs. Henry in her classroom after the first day of school, she told me Tiny Tim was *very quiet* (Field notes, September 2, 2009). I was in to help her set up her classroom. I only joined the class later in September, after she had a chance to know her students. That was all I heard from her about Tiny Tim.

The following week, I met with Tiny Tim's parents to hear about his start of the new school year. Morgan and Jay welcomed me into their house early in September 2009. Jay enjoyed being involved in his sons' lives even though he travelled regularly for work (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). We sat at the kitchen table to chat (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Morgan mentioned how excited Tiny Tim was to start school again; he had slept well the night before although he told his mother he did not want to go to school and that he hated school (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Morgan described his first morning:

He got up the next morning; he got dressed, and got on to school. . . He was more excited about seeing his friends I think and seeing whose class he was in, and who

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<sup>85</sup> You may recall that I met Matson before Tiny Tim to negotiate the narrative accounts. As Tiny Tim had moved away, I chose to write Matson's Grade 2 narrative account first and meet him before I wrote Tiny Tim's narrative account and met him to negotiate it. I chose to put Tiny Tim's narrative account first because I wrote his Grade 1 narrative account before I wrote Matson's.



he was with. It turned out he has his best friend Josh in the class. So, that works out really good. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009)

After his first day at school, Morgan shared that he liked his teacher and was happy in his class (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). She asked him how his day was; “We did this, we did that, and we had gym . . . He was looking forward to go to school the next day”, reported Morgan (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). She told me Tiny Tim came home and told her who was in trouble with the teacher; Jay, who thought his son to be very talkative, added, “He has a lot sterner teacher this year which actually I think will be good for him. He needs a bit of direction. He just needs to have a really solid expectation. He does better in that space” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Morgan agreed with Jay; she thought Mrs. Henry was “quite strict . . . By lunch time, when they eat, it’s quiet time. There’s no talking” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Jay added jokingly that his son ate more with that rule (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Morgan later emphasized that:

Their noise is to be made out on the playground . . . That is what outside is for . . . the gym and the playground . . . When you’re in class, you’re there to learn.

You’re there to sit quietly and work, and that’s what he needs . . . I think that will help him . . . He [used to] ask to go to the hallway to work cause it [was] quiet.

(Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009)

Jay felt the same way as Morgan did; “I think it’ll be a good year for him, more structure”, he noted (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Tiny Tim’s parents were optimistic about their son’s upcoming Grade 2 academic year. They

believed the quiet environment Mrs. Henry created for her students would be beneficial for their son.

**Old story.** Morgan expressed concern about her son's sitting partner. On the first day of school, Tiny Tim sat at a desk when he arrived in the classroom; when Travis arrived, Morgan indicated he chose to sit next to Tiny Tim (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Morgan recalled that Tiny Tim had problems with Travis the previous year:

He choked Tiny Tim in the bathroom . . . He didn't like something Tiny Tim did. . . . He and Brandon were in the bathroom washing their hands, and I think [Travis] was spraying water . . . Tiny Tim asked him not to do that, and [Travis] choked him or something . . . I haven't said anything to Mrs. Henry . . . I'm going to wait and see if anything new transpires. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009)

I asked Morgan if Tiny Tim felt unsafe sitting next to Travis; the only thing he mentioned was that Travis "bug[ged] him a bit . . . He's excited and I can't get my work done 'cause he's bugging me" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Morgan's friend knew Mrs. Henry because her son was in her class before; she encouraged Morgan to talk to the teacher if she wanted the issue resolved (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Morgan thought if the problem persisted, she and Tiny Tim would go talk to Mrs. Henry:

I'm not going to go on my own. He's going to have to go in and I'll be there to back him up . . . He'll start up and he'll shy away, but "No, Tiny Tim, if you want

a change you have to start dealing with it too”. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009)

Morgan had apprehension about Travis sitting next to Tiny Tim. She knew her son was uncomfortable with him because of the incident in Grade 1. However, Morgan decided to wait and see how things evolved. If needed, she would go in to talk with the teacher but Tiny Tim would go with her; she wanted him involved in the process.

**New classmates.** Morgan talked about how the school staff “really mixed up the classrooms this year” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). There were three different Grade 1 classes when Tiny Tim was in Grade 1 and in his new Grade 2 class, only six children from Mrs. Taylor’s class were in Mrs. Henry’s (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). When she walked into Tiny Tim’s Grade 2 classroom, she did not recognize many children; she knew five from Tiny Tim’s Grade 1 class and two from his Kindergarten class (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Morgan pointed out her son did not know half of his class; Jay thought it would be “good for him, right? Maybe he’ll meet some new kids” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009).

Morgan talked about her request to the school about moving her eldest son to a different class:

I don’t care if he is with his friends. We could stick him in a class where he knows no one. I don’t care . . . I’m worried about his welfare and his learning. And his schooling comes first, before his social life, sorry. He could see his friends at recess and at lunch, and at gym. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009)

Morgan emphasized academics over social life for her son Luke, who was starting Grade 4. I wondered if she felt the same way about Tiny Tim. Luke had been a *successful* student (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009) while Tiny Tim had challenges in Grade 1. Did her comment on how Tiny Tim did not know half of his class reflect her wish for him to be surrounded by more friends than she wished for Luke? Did she want Tiny Tim to be with friends?

**Not helping anymore.** Morgan was used to being in Tiny Tim's classroom in Grade 1. She regularly helped Mrs. Taylor (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). In Grade 2, it was different. Morgan asked Mrs. Henry if she needed help, but she did not (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Morgan assumed Mrs. Henry, who had over 30 years of experience as a teacher:

learned to rely on herself. Where some of the newer teachers, now, they expect parents in the classroom. Mrs. Henry [is] not one of them . . . She likes help with art projects . . . She [said she doesn't] need it for everyday stuff. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009)

Jay and Morgan recognized how different Mrs. Henry was from Mrs. Taylor as far as helpers in the classroom were concerned (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009).

**Party points.** When Morgan was in Tiny Tim's classroom for a few minutes early in the year, he showed her how the party points worked, and how he and his classmates could earn points for their team (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Tiny Tim told his mother his team was struggling because a boy in his group cost them two points (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10,

2009). Even though Morgan was in her son's classroom only for a brief visit, Tiny Tim chose to show her the point system and to comment on the points his team lost. Party points seemed to preoccupy Tiny Tim, at least in this moment.

### **Starting school visits—Sonia and Tiny Tim**

I started my weekly visits to the classroom in mid-September as previously negotiated with Mrs. Henry. At the end of September, I met with Tiny Tim for the first time; I asked him about Grade 2.

Sonia:           How are things going in Grade 2?

Tiny Tim:       Good. Good. We . . . mostly write. Doing centres was the start of the year . . . (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, September 28, 2009)

Tiny Tim did not elaborate about writing and doing centres. He moved on to tell me about something else. Although I did not, I would have liked to inquire into his comments on mostly writing and doing centres at the start of the year, as I found them telling about what was significant for Tiny Tim.

The following day I was in the classroom, the children had to complete a worksheet where they had to sort a number of words into four different groups; when the children were done, they were allowed to go to a centre (Field notes, September 30, 2009). I was surprised to hear Mrs. Henry tell her students they could go to a centre once they were done their work; Tiny Tim had told me centres were at the start of the year. I wondered if those centres were mostly for children who finished their work. That day, Tiny Tim finished his work and went to a centre (Field notes, September 30, 2009). I did not understand why he told me centres were at the start of the year. Did Tiny Tim

seldom finish his work on time to be able to do a centre? Tara, a girl in his class, did not finish her work that morning and was unable to go to a centre (Field notes, September 30, 2009). Did that happen to Tiny Tim as well, I wondered.

### **Parenting a Young Reader—Early in the Year—Morgan and Jay**

Jay and Morgan recognized the importance of reading, and how home reading could contribute to a skill they perceived as essential (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009). Morgan's friend, who had a child in Mrs. Henry's class before, told her she did not "split [the readers] into groups like most teachers" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). During self-selected reading in Grade 1, Mrs. Taylor split the children in various groups of readers. I believe Morgan worried her son might not have the support he required with his reading since the teaching was mostly done in a large group setting<sup>86</sup> versus the *split* groups. Morgan added, "I think we'll really have to work with him on certain things at home this year" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Jay replied, "That's fine, I mean, it's not like we haven't done that before, right?" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Morgan and Jay were involved in their children's schooling and did not mind helping with homework and reading.

**Specifics of the home reading program.** The home reading program in Mrs. Henry's class was different from what it was in Mrs. Taylor's class. There was no collection of books for the home reading program. In the Grade 2 classroom, there were books, but they were for classroom use mostly. For the home reading program, the

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<sup>86</sup> Mrs. Henry indicated to me upon reading this comment that she did split the group and took small groups of children to the side to go over words (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, January 9, 2012)

children picked three books from school library during their weekly visit (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Morgan explained how Mrs. Henry proceeded: “She lets the kids pick their own books . . . once a week . . . I think her plan is that they should be reading chapter books. Well, he’s nowhere near ready for chapter books” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Morgan was convinced her son was not ready to read chapter books. I asked her why she thought Mrs. Henry’s plan was for the children to read chapter books, but we never clarified that during the conversation (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Morgan’s friend mentioned to her that when her son “would bring not adequate books for reading . . . She went to Mrs. Henry and said, ‘Can you make sure that he’s got one book that he can use for home reading?’” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Morgan found “some of [the] picture books that the kids bring home, they’ve got bigger words in [them] than a chapter book. [They’re] not necessarily age appropriate” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Morgan said she would talk to Mrs. Henry if needed, but she also thought if it came to that (meaning if Tiny Tim brought books not at his level), she could use her own books as she had many at home for her son to read or could take him to the public library (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009).

I asked Morgan if Mrs. Henry had an accounting system for the home reading program; she told me there was nothing yet (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). She wondered if the accounting would be per night or per book (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). She recalled how Mrs. Taylor had her students read a book per night and record the title (Transcript, Sonia &

Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Tiny Tim and his parents were proud of his reading achievements in Grade 1. He read a lot. I believe Morgan looked forward to helping her son feel the same pride with his reading in Grade 2.

**Happy to be reading.** When I met Morgan in October, she mentioned Tiny Tim “finished his first sheet with his reading and was proud” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October 9, 2009). Tiny Tim seemed to be diligent with his home reading and felt good about his achievement. Morgan was amused when her son said to her, “I want to read chapter books” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October 9, 2009). Morgan explained her son Luke had chapter books Tiny Tim could read:

The Black Lagoon series in chapter books . . . There’s pictures on every page still . . . but they’re not coloured and not distracting, and it’s a chapter book, so, he started reading it . . . We’re on Chapter 5 now. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October 9, 2009).

I asked if she read the book to her son or if he did, and she said, “He reads it to me” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October 9, 2009). She added:

He’s really come along with his reading, like, he will sit and . . . He’ll read a page [and] goes, “mom, you didn’t help me with one word on that page”. . . . He’s enjoying it. . . . It’s not a chore. . . . There’s a few days where . . . he’ll read a quick book and then he’s gone . . . but most times . . . he reads right after school and then when we sit and watch TV at nights, he wants to read again. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October 9, 2009)

**Strategically choosing books.** Morgan seemed happy with her son’s attitude toward reading and with his progress. She mentioned Tiny Tim picked what she called



“level 2 books” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October 9, 2009) when choosing books at the library. She shared how Tiny Tim strategically chose certain books so he could fill out the sheet for the home reading program. She explained:

He brought home, I think, a level 1 yesterday, and he goes, “Mom, I got these just so I could write some more books down while I’m reading my chapter book” . . .

That’s good. . . . When he picks the easier books . . . he gets the fluency down too, so, I’m not . . . worried about it, right? The words might not be challenging but it teaches him how to do pauses. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October 9, 2009)

Morgan described how Tiny Tim knew to choose easy books to read for the purpose of filling out his reading sheet while he was interested in reading a chapter book. She valued her son’s book choices because she saw an occasion for him to work on reading fluency while using material that was not challenging for him.

**Managing books and the reading schedule.** Morgan felt Tiny Tim needed to read more than three books a week, so she took him to the public library to find books he would like to read (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October 9, 2009). She showed me the books he picked that week; she noted he was “getting more adventurous with the length of them” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October 9, 2009). Morgan was closely involved in her son’s reading at home and made an effort to provide him with a large variety of books. Although Morgan encouraged her sons to read every night, she told me they did not read on weekend:

I don’t make them on weekend. If he wants to read, we can read, but weekends are kind of their . . . break. . . . starting Sunday night, because that’s when we get back to the bedtime routine. . . . So, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday,

Thursday night we read every night, and you know, he seems to be enjoying it.

(Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October 9, 2009)

## **Being a Reader—Tiny Tim**

**Purposefully choosing books.** When I met Tiny Tim for a conversation one morning, we stopped at the library to exchange his books because he missed library that week (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, October 16, 2009). I asked him questions while he looked at books to take home.

Sonia:           What do you do when you pick your books? . . . You wanted to pick books with a pumpkin because . . .

Tiny Tim:       I was looking at the symbols, like, if you see a pumpkin on them . . . You know it's a Halloween book 'cause Halloween has pumpkins.

Sonia:           Okay.

Tiny Tim:       I found one inside the library at the back, and I saw some at the front.

Sonia:           And I saw you open the book too.

Tiny Tim:       Yes.

Sonia:           What were you looking for?

Tiny Tim:       I was looking at the words to see if I could read them, and I was looking at the pictures to see [if] I like the pictures.

Sonia:           Ok.

Tiny Tim:       But sometimes, they're too scary. They're not really nice and are not really good pictures.

Sonia: What kind of pictures do you like?

Tiny Tim: I'll show you (He takes one of his books out to show me). . . . This one has really good things . . . . This one has scary pictures . . . . They did really good with that one . . . . This is a skeleton's head, which I don't like. . . This is a mummy. . . And this is a vampire. This is the one that is really freaky . . . He does look cool . . .

Sonia: What tells you if . . . you can read a book?

Tiny Tim: Well, if the book, like this one . . . There's not that much [words], and they're small and big, like those kinds of words I was just looking at. That'd be a pretty good one for me to read . . .

Sonia: So, you're looking for letters that are big or small?

Tiny Tim: Pretty small. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, October 16, 2009)

Tiny Tim tried to explain to me which size of letters he thought would be good for him to read:

Sometimes, if I'm not really in the mood to read books, I kind of just like to read big words . . . If they are like a chapter book, if I'm really in the mood to read, I will read like two chapters. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, October 16, 2009).

I asked Tiny Tim when he felt in the mood to read; he replied:

Sometimes, if I'm kind of happy after school, I like to read two books, three books . . . if I'm almost done, like down to here, like on that sheet (home reading sheet). I want to read four books. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, October 16, 2009).

This excerpt helps me understand Tiny Tim felt like reading when he was happy after school, and when he was almost done filling out the sheet for the home reading program. He mentioned there was a chest box that contained treats; when Mrs. Henry told them, they could pick one (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, October 16, 2009). I believe the children picked a treat from that chest when they brought back a sheet full of titles of books they read at home.

**Reading moods.** I brought a case of crayons and some paper one day in case Tiny Tim wanted to draw; he used some markers and a roller stamp<sup>87</sup> he found in the case (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, October 16, 2009). Tiny Tim talked about the *moods of reading* (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, October 16, 2009). He drew a picture and described it representing him going *on a walk around and around* which, he explained to me, meant he wanted “to read a lot of books ‘cause [he] really like[d] them” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, October 16, 2009). He added:

If I’m in a walking mood, that means I’m kind of in the reading mood . . . And if I was kind of in a fat mood, like not really working, I’d put a fat line . . . like, I wouldn’t want to read that much . . . If I was in a small walking mood . . . I don’t want to read. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, October 16, 2009)

I was not sure I understood clearly what Tiny Tim tried to explain to me. We returned to this topic a few minutes later during that same conversation.

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<sup>87</sup> The roller stamp printed hearts of different sizes. Tiny Tim thought the hearts were footsteps. This explains his reference to a *walk* during our conversations (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, November 6, 2009).

Tiny Tim: The mood means how I like to walk, like, the walking mood thing is that . . . If I wasn't in the mood, I would put a little walking circle, like I did on that one [page].

Sonia: Oh, I get it . . .

Tiny Tim: Some nights, I like to go on this mood, the big mood . . . But if I'm tired, I want to . . . get worked up again, and if I play a little, I can get worked up. But if I don't play, I kind of get tired, and I read, and I sleep when I'm trying to read . . .

Sonia: Playing helps you . . . get in the mood?

Tiny Tim: Yeah, playing sometimes helps me get the mood so I can keep on working and reading.

Sonia: What if you're in a little mood, like tired, and you have lots to read? What do you do?

Tiny Tim: Well . . . I would do a little reading before supper, and I would do some more reading after supper.

Sonia: Do you think about all that by yourself?

Tiny Tim: Well, I was kind of, I was in Grade 1, and one time I thought about it, and I'm like, I don't want to read a lot, and I went . . . I was trying to read a lot. What would I do . . . and I'm like, oh yeah, I can do this . . . I know what to do. I could read before supper while it's cooking, and I would read after supper while I was finished. And that's how I got the idea . . .

Sonia: You told me you read chapter books now.

Tiny Tim: Well, the point of the chapter books is, I like to read a lot. That's about the walking circuit . . . the big . . . circuit. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, October 16, 2009)

The conversation I had with Tiny Tim, about home reading, helped me learn how much he knew about the management of his reading sessions. He talked about feelings, physical states, and motivation which all contributed to his *moods of reading* and influenced how he managed his home reading.

### **Attending to Tiny Tim, the Reader—Sonia**

When I watched Tiny Tim during silent reading the first day I was in his class, he looked like he could read the words in the book (Field notes, September 14, 2009). Shortly after, he closed his book for a moment and then started to read it again; I did not know if he was done (Field notes, September 14, 2009). The next week, I noticed him reading his book and later, balancing it; I wondered if he was done reading it, or if he just felt like playing (Field notes, September 21, 2009). I understood why some children in the class closed their books and waited during silent reading when Mrs. Henry explained to me how she managed the reading period. She wanted her students to learn to pick the *right level* of books, books that would keep them reading for the period; if they were done reading the books before the period ended, they had to wait (Field notes, October 21, 2009).

I tried to notice how Tiny Tim navigated the literacy activities in Grade 2. During the read along activity one morning, Tiny Tim followed with his finger but did not read aloud; the reading pace seemed too fast for him (Field notes, September 21, 2009).

Following that activity, when Mrs. Henry asked questions to the children about the story they just heard, Tiny Tim did not volunteer any answers (Field notes, September 21, 2009). A few days later, during another read along, Tiny Tim seemed lost and could not follow with his finger, even though he kept trying (Field notes, September 25, 2009). One morning, Mrs. Henry introduced a new list of words she had written on the board; one of them was *rip* (Field notes, September 21, 2009). She asked Tiny Tim for a rhyming word to rip; he initially had no answer, but after Mrs. Henry pointed to *ip*, he said *ship* (Field notes, September 21, 2009). The children also engaged in a letter activity where they all had the same letters with which they made words that they wrote in their spelling book (Field notes, September 23, 2009). When it was over, I looked at Tiny Tim who proudly showed me the words he made and wrote in his book (Field notes, September 23, 2009). The same day, Mrs. Henry had her students read words on the board; these words came from the story they read in their readers (Field notes, September 23, 2009). She asked groups of children to read those words; Tiny Tim's group had difficulties reading the words (Field notes, September 23, 2009). Mrs. Henry continued with the story from the reader; she asked questions about the characters in the story (Field notes, September 23, 2009). This time, Tiny Tim put his hand up and answered the question; he seemed engaged (Field notes, September 23, 2009).

Following the discussion about the story, it was time for the Smarties Game; I watched Tiny Tim's group of *low* readers<sup>88</sup> play (Field notes, September 23, 2009). They all managed to read their words, with or without their teacher's help, and earned Smarties

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<sup>88</sup> Mrs. Henry had reading groups: low, middle and strong. Tiny Tim was on the *low* team that was called *the fireballs* (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, October 28, 2009).

(Field notes, September 23, 2009). Before I left that morning, Mrs. Henry read a book to the class; Tiny Tim listened attentively (Field notes, September 23, 2009).

Another morning, I noticed that Tiny Tim read with great interest a story on a sheet titled *Wanted: A friend* (Field notes, September 25, 2009). I assumed he was able to read that text well if he was so absorbed. When I listened to him read during silent reading a few days later, I thought his reading skills were improving; he read a more difficult book that day (Field notes, September 30, 2009).

### **In-class Reading Activities—Tiny Tim**

**Smarties Game.** Later in October, Tiny Tim played the Smarties Game; he picked the word *chuckled* and tried to read it (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, October 26, 2009). He had the card in his hand, looked at the word, and tried to sound it out; Mrs. Henry asked to see it (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, October 26, 2009). Julia<sup>89</sup> who saw the word when Tiny Tim showed it to his teacher said, “That’s easy” (Field notes, October 26, 2009). Tiny Tim tried again to sound it out; his teacher gave him hints: “It’s like giggled . . . What does *ch* make? . . . What does *ed* make?” (Field notes, October 26, 2009). Even though Tiny Tim worked to sound out the word, he could not read it (Field notes, October 26, 2009). He passed the card to Julia who read *chuckled* without hesitation; she earned a Smartie while Tiny Tim had none (Field notes, October 26, 2009). That same day, I had a conversation with Tiny Tim. I asked him to explain the Smarties Game to me.

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<sup>89</sup> Julia was part of Mrs. Henry’s *strong* readers’ group. She played the game with Tiny Tim that day because many children were sick and Mrs. Henry made one single group.



Sonia: I was wondering if you could tell me about the game you were playing with the Smarties. I'm not sure that I know exactly how you play it. What is it called?

Tiny Tim: Smarties Game . . . You know, those words . . . remember on the board, not the spelling ones, the little words, big words . . . We put them on papers, and you can look on the board, but they're backwards . . . and you have to read them.

Sonia: You have to read them, okay.

Tiny Tim: No one helps!

Sonia: No one helps?

Tiny Tim: Except Mrs. Henry. She gets to start, and then you read.

Sonia: Okay. So, you have to read and then, what happens if you read it?

Tiny Tim: You get a Smartie.

Sonia: Oh. And what happens if you can't read the word?

Tiny Tim: You pass it on, and you don't get one.

Sonia: Really?

Tiny Tim: Yep, too bad isn't it?

Sonia: It is.

Tiny Tim: No, you don't even get one. So . . . this is the mat, square . . . You know, the base? . . .

Sonia: The board?

Tiny Tim: Yeah. . . . the board . . . where all the stuff is on . . . And these are the people out here (he draws a picture to show me). . . .

Sonia: There are groups of kids . . . Do you just go whenever you feel like it?

Tiny Tim: Actually, when she calls your group, you have to go with her. You have to go even if you don't want to. You have to go!

Sonia: Do you sometimes not want to go, or you want to go all the time?

Tiny Tim: Sometimes I don't much.

Sonia: Why don't you want to go? . . .

Tiny Tim: Sometimes I don't, sometimes I do. . . . I've been sick . . . remember?

Sonia: So, you don't feel like going sometimes 'cause you're sick?

Tiny Tim: Yeah.

Sonia: You like the game?

Tiny Tim: Uh huh.

Sonia: Do you get Smarties all the time?

Tiny Tim: Hmmm, I'm not sure.

Sonia: Did you get Smarties today?

Tiny Tim: Yep . . . one.

Sonia: And that word you were trying to read, did you finally read it?

Tiny Tim: No.

Sonia: You did not get a Smartie for that?

Tiny Tim: (He makes no with his head.) And then we went back to our desks.

Sonia: How do you feel when you can't read a word?

Tiny Tim: Sad.

Sonia: Do you know kids who always get the words?

Tiny Tim: Yes.

Sonia: And kids who often don't get words?

Tiny Tim: Most kids get the words . . . Anna never gets them. . . She doesn't practise them.

Sonia: When do you practise them?

Tiny Tim: At night.

Sonia: How do you know she doesn't practise them?

Tiny Tim: She hasn't been reading the words because she doesn't get them right. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, October 26, 2009)

This exchange between Tiny Tim and I gave me his perspective on the way they played the Smarties Game, and on its context. I was perplexed when I heard him talk about Anna, who could not read the words. I wondered if other children had similar thoughts about Tiny Tim, when he was unable to read a word. I asked Tiny Tim who was in his group when they played the Smarties Game; he said, Matson, Jack, and Anna! (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, October 26, 2009). When he named Anna, his tone seemed to convey irritation. I wondered why he felt this way about her. What irritated him about Anna? Was it because she could not read words?

During another conversation in November, I asked Tiny Tim if he knew why his teacher had them listen to the tape during the read along activity.

Sonia: You know how teachers ask kids to do stuff in school?

Tiny Tim: Yep!

Sonia: They usually do it for a reason . . . like, when you [listen] to the story on the tape. Do you know why Mrs. Henry does that with you?

Tiny Tim: It helps us know where we are. And it helps us, sometimes, with the words.

Sonia: Yes. So, the tape helps you read the stories?

Tiny Tim: Yeah.

Sonia: Why do you think Mrs. Henry plays the Smarties Game with you?

Tiny Tim: Oh, it helps us do big words. . . .

Sonia: Do you like the game?

Tiny Tim: I do sometimes, and I don't . . . Sometimes . . . when I'm bored, like, [when] we're doing a test . . . I would like to [play]. (He laughs.)

Sonia: Instead of a test?

Tiny Tim: Yep!

Sonia: But you like the Smarties Game sometimes.

Tiny Tim: Yes.

Sonia: When don't you like it?

Tiny Tim: I don't like it when I'm, like, doing something like I really like, like crafts. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, November 19, 2009)

Tiny Tim said he enjoyed playing the Smarties Game, but it did not seem to be his favourite activity. He preferred to do crafts rather than play the game. We continued to talk about the game.

Sonia: What happens to kids who have a hard time reading words?

Tiny Tim: You only get . . . like a couple of minutes . . . about 10 seconds, 11 seconds . . .

Sonia: You always get a Smartie? . . .

Tiny Tim: Sometimes. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, November 19, 2009)

Tiny Tim was aware there was a limited time to read the words, and he acknowledged he did not always earn a Smartie. I recalled the day he was playing and could not read the word *chuckled*.

Sonia: I remember you had to read the word *chuckled*.

Tiny Tim: Yes, but I got it wrong.

Sonia: Well, you tried . . . That was not an easy word to read.

Tiny Tim: No, it's hard. It's pretty hard.

Sonia: And you didn't get a Smartie, right?

Tiny Tim: No.

Sonia: I heard someone say *that's easy*.

Tiny Tim: I know.

Sonia: I was sitting there thinking, hmmm, if I were trying to read a word and somebody said *it's easy*, how would I feel?

Tiny Tim: Sad . . . and also you would want to say something but . . . the teacher would kind of get mad at you. (He laughs.)

Sonia: You would say something to whom?

Tiny Tim: The girl who said it . . . I don't know; *be quiet* . . .

Sonia: If somebody said, *oh, that's easy*, I was wondering. Would that make me feel dumb?

Tiny Tim: No . . . I would just feel sad . . . haven't been practising them, but I have. It's just hard to remember. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, November 19, 2009)

Through our conversation, I learned that Tiny Tim felt sad, not dumb, when he could not read a word. He stated the word he could not read was *hard*, and it was *hard to remember* it. He also mentioned he wanted to tell the girl who said, *it's easy*, to be quiet, but he did not because he thought that would make the teacher mad. Tiny Tim noticed the comment his classmate made and seemed sensitive to it.

**Reading comprehension.** Throughout the fall, I continued to read with Tiny Tim during silent reading; one morning, he seemed happy to tell me he could read chapter books (Field notes, November 4, 2009). The following day, I thought he easily read the common words from the book he chose (Field notes, November 9, 2009). I read a sentence without pausing after the period; he shared with me his father taught him to stop after a period (Field notes, November 9, 2009). Tiny Tim spontaneously displayed knowledge about reading during the time I spent with him. A few days later, during silent reading, he read a book from the series *Toad and Frog*; he pointed out it was a chapter book (Field notes, November 18, 2009). In the book, Toad did not want to get out of bed. When Frog knocked at his door, Toad answered, "There's nobody here" (Field notes, November 18, 2009). Following Toad's response, Tiny Tim said, "That never works"; he made me laugh (Field notes, November 18, 2009). I was amused by his

remark but, at the same time, I was impressed to see how much he interacted with the story, and how much he understood it.

### **Attending to Tiny Tim the Reader—Early in the Year—Morgan**

During a conversation in October, I mentioned to Morgan that Tiny Tim seemed to be reading more words; she agreed (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October 9, 2009).

She pointed out:

He's also starting to . . . look at the picture for clues . . . and . . . there [was] a word that I know he couldn't read, but he knew . . . where the thought was going, and he managed to finish it . . . I was like, wow! (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October 9, 2009).

Morgan seemed happy to share the strategies her son used when he read to her:

He's funny because when he sounds out a word . . . and he's doubting himself . . . I can faintly hear him say it . . . He's thinking out loud . . . Then he gets it, and then he's all proud of himself . . . I'm like, "Yeah, that's right", and on he goes. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October 9, 2009)

We continued our conversation. I asked Morgan if Mrs. Henry suggested anything to address his reading; she said, "No . . . she hasn't . . . other than the fact that she watches what he picks from the library" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October 9, 2009).

According to Morgan, Mrs. Henry attended to Tiny Tim's reading by guiding him in choosing the appropriate level of books from the library for home reading.

## Parenting a Young Speller—Early in the Year—Morgan

Morgan told me spelling tests started early in September in Mrs. Henry's class; she mentioned Tiny Tim had a spelling list with simple words to study, and he had only one wrong on the test (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). I asked Morgan how her son studied for his spelling tests. She explained they "go over the words every morning and usually after school. [She] read[s] them to him, and he has to write them out" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009).

Morgan noted that Tiny Tim mixed the *bs* and the *ds* when he wrote, and she believed it was *quite common* for children that age (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). She shared that she pointed out to Tiny Tim he had the alphabet on his desk, and he could refer to it; "You know *b* comes before *d*, so look at your alphabet" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). Although Morgan told her son to refer to the alphabet on his desk, she reported he did not think he was allowed:

I said, "You know your alphabet. You know you can go A, B, C, D . . . You know that, [and] you see it" . . . And he's like . . . "Well Mrs. Henry doesn't want [us] to do that". I said, "How would Mrs. Henry know if you're looking at that . . . It's not like you're looking for a word". (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October 9, 2009)

Morgan tried to help her son by teaching him strategies that would help him discriminate when to use the letters *b* and *d* appropriately. She did not think there was anything wrong with looking at the alphabet to know which way *b* and *d* go, but Tiny Tim seemed to think it was not allowed.



## Becoming a Writer—Early in the Year—Tiny Tim

Tiny Tim came by my desk one morning in October and asked if I could sharpen his pencil; while I did, he told me he had written *a lot* the previous day and looked proud of himself (Field notes, October 9, 2009). Later in November, I watched him volunteer to read a piece he wrote about Halloween to the class; when he was done, he walked by my desk and radiantly showed me his page, pointing to the period at the end (Field notes, November 2, 2009). I believe he wanted me to notice he used the period at the end of the sentence. Two days later, he showed me another piece he wrote; again, he looked proud of his accomplishment (Field notes, November 4, 2009).

I thought Tiny Tim's spelling was relatively close to the standard spelling and/or made sense phonetically. I noticed a few times during the year how he spelled according to the way he pronounced some words. For example, he wrote *chprlen* for trampoline (Field notes, September 25, 2009), and later in November, he wrote *chruck* for *truck* (Field notes, November 4, 2009). Even though Tiny Tim needed to work on his spelling, he had knowledge of the written code.

I learned about his thinking concerning spelling during a conversation in November; we discussed some of the rhyming words from the worksheet he was trying to complete while we talked (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, November 6, 2009).

Tiny Tim: *Leap. Leap.* But it's those two letters, A, E, not the E, E.

Sonia: With rhyming words, different letters might make the same sound.

Tiny Tim: Yeah, but E and A make E, and E and E make E.

Sonia: You're right! . . .

Tiny Tim: L, E, A, *leap* and *deep*. I hope that she puts a check mark on that.

Sonia: She probably will. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, November 6, 2009)

He put his worksheet away to finish it at home and started to write words on a picture I had drawn representing him writing a spelling test (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, November 6, 2009).

Tiny Tim: I got *meat*, the *meat* you eat. . . . Oh, those are the dotted lines.

Sonia: Oh, those dotted lines . . . There's lots of dotted lines in your . . . spelling book. . . .

Tiny Tim: (He draws the dotted lines.) Just like this . . . A *C* would go like this (he positioned the *C* on the lines).

Sonia: You know how to . . . use those lines really well. So, you're spelling the word *hear*?

Tiny Tim: The *hear* you use for your ears.

Sonia: Not the *here* like *come here*.

Tiny Tim: No.

Sonia: It's a different *hear*?

Tiny Tim: Come *here* to me. The other *hear*'s like this: H, E, R, E.

Sonia: Wow! You know so much!

Tiny Tim: That's how I used to spell it when I didn't know, but my mom said, "That's the other *hear*" . . . And this one is *meat*. There's two *meats*; the *meat* where you eat . . . That's the *meat* you eat (he

writes *meat*). This is the other *meet*; M, E, E, T. I *meet* a new friend.

(Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, November 6, 2009)

Tiny Tim could talk about how to position letters on the lines in his spelling book, and he could also differentiate words containing the same sounds but spelled differently. He noted his mother pointed out to him there was another way to write *hear*. I found our conversation informative about Tiny Tim's spelling skills.

### **Tiny Tim in Relationship with Sonia—Sonia and Tiny Tim**

**Getting reacquainted with each other.** I remembered when I looked for Tiny Tim the first day I was in Mrs. Henry's class. After I located him in the classroom, our eyes met and he smiled at me (Field notes, September 14, 2009). I was happy to see him again. During the morning, Tiny Tim came to tell me about his weekend and about painting their shed (Field notes, September 14, 2009). I believe he liked to come and chat with me in Grade 1. I felt the same way in Grade 2, even though a summer had passed and we were in a different environment with a different teacher. That first day, he did something I remembered he often did in Grade 1; he asked for my help (Field notes, September 14, 2009). He was busy cutting out sentences and gluing them in one of two columns: likes or dislikes (Field notes, September 14, 2009). More than once, he asked me to help him during that activity; he could read most of the words in the sentences but hesitated on some of them (Field notes, September 14, 2009).

The second day I came to his class, Tiny Tim reminded me I had not taken him for a *test* the first day I was in (Field notes, September 16, 2009). I explained to him that

I was not in his class to give him tests, rather, I was there to talk and, sometimes play with him; I added that soon, I would take him again to talk, but before I could, I needed to ask his teacher (Field notes, September 16, 2009). One morning, he came by my desk, looked at my pages of field notes, and said, “You have to fill the whole page?” (Field notes, September 23, 2009). He liked to interact with me and inquire into what I did. He also often came by to tell me about himself. One day, he showed me the three teeth he lost during the weekend (Field notes, October 14, 2009). His mother mentioned that Tiny Tim told her I was in his class (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October 9, 2009). I felt Tiny Tim liked being with me, and I believed we had a good relationship.

The first time I took him upstairs to talk in Grade 2 was during lunchtime; meeting at that time did not work well because it was difficult for Tiny Tim to talk and eat at the same time, and be ready to go out for recess (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, September 28, 2009). Before he left to go outside to play, I asked him to sign an assent form for participating in the research; he said, “again?” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, September 28, 2009). He remembered signing one in Grade 1. I asked if it would be okay with him to talk with me at lunchtime; he said, “Uh huh, as long as I don’t miss my lunch” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, September 28, 2009). As it turned out, we never met over lunch again because there was not enough time to talk and eat. Mrs. Henry suggested I take Tiny Tim during class time when she heard meeting at lunch did not work so well (Field notes, September 30, 2009). I appreciated her offer and accepted it. Soon after discussing when to meet with Tiny Tim, Mrs. Henry noticed him at my desk and wondered if he had a problem; I explained that he came to ask if I was taking him (Field notes, September 30, 2009). I was an extra adult in the classroom; the children

interacted with me, especially Tiny Tim, who often came to my desk. I wondered if that might be a problem with Mrs. Henry. On another morning, Tiny Tim came to see how much I had written and wondered if we would be talking that day; I told him we would meet every other Wednesday to which he replied “Okay, I get it” (Field notes, October 5, 2009). He left my desk and returned to his; I sensed he was disappointed with my meeting plan.

**Securing a relationship.** At the end of September, Haden arrived in Mrs. Henry’s class (Field notes, September 30, 2009). He was a new student. A few days later, I approached him to explain who I was in the classroom and asked if he would sign an assent form, like the other children had done earlier in the month, to allow him to talk with me (Field notes, October 7, 2009). Haden had no hesitation signing it and said he wanted to talk to me (Field notes, October, 7, 2009). At one point, I looked over at Tiny Tim and noticed he was looking at Haden and me talking (Field notes, October, 7, 2009). I wondered what Tiny Tim thought. I sensed he was worried or confused. We did not have a chance to talk about this, and Tiny Tim never mentioned anything either. Later that day, when the children had to colour puppets they had made earlier, Tiny Tim asked if I could help him colour his (Field notes, October 7, 2009). I felt he wanted my company. I wondered if he thought I would be taking Haden, as I took him, after seeing me ask Haden to sign a consent form. A few minutes later, Tiny Tim came by my desk and asked if I would take him that day; I indicated that I would take him the following week (Field notes, October 7, 2009). I believed he looked forward to resuming our meetings, but I wondered about his reaction in response to my interactions with other students in the class. In mid-October, I started taking Tiny Tim for conversations on a

regular basis and hoped he felt more secure about our relationship. At the end of a conversation in October, it was difficult to have Tiny Tim pack his things and return to the classroom (Field notes, October 16, 2009). I sensed he wanted to stay with me and keep talking. I was happy to have such a good relationship with him and enjoyed his company.

During the months I spent in Mrs. Henry's classroom alongside Tiny Tim, I believe we became friends. He regularly came by my desk: to work (Field notes, January 20, 2010; field notes, February 1, 2010); to show me his work (Field notes, October 30, 2009; field notes, January 18, 2010); to tell me about extra-curricular activities such as hockey (Field notes, November 2, 2009; field notes, January 18, 2010); to share what he did during the weekend (Field notes, November 16, 2009); to ask where I was one Monday I did not come in (Field notes, December 2, 2009); to give me a Christmas card and a Valentine's Day card (Field notes, December 18, 2009; field notes, February 8, 2010); and to look at my field notes (Field notes, September, 23, 2009; field notes, January 18, 2010). One morning as I was settling in the classroom, Tiny Tim came to talk to me and helped pin my volunteer badge on my sweater (Field notes, October 28, 2009). On a few occasions, I wondered if this was too disruptive for Mrs. Henry.

**Reading together and more.** Beside visiting me to chat and share information, Tiny Tim regularly asked me to read with him during silent reading in the morning (Field notes, November 4, 9, 18, 25, 2009; field notes, December 2, 9, 16, 2009; field notes, January 4, 6, 2010). During a conversation with Mrs. Henry in early January, she and I decided I should take Travis, a struggling reader, and read with him during silent reading (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, January 10, 2010). The following day, I asked Travis if

he wanted to come and read with me; without hesitation he agreed (Field notes, January 13, 2010). Tiny Tim, who watched me interact with Travis, exclaimed, “What are you doing?” (Field notes, January 13, 2010). I often read with him in the morning; I was changing the routine we had. Unfortunately, I never read with Tiny Tim again as my remaining time in the classroom was spent reading with Travis, who, Mrs. Henry felt needed my help. I wondered how Tiny Tim understood those changes. He knew Travis was not a participant as he and Matson were; he had made this clear after we returned from a conversation one day (Field notes, November 6, 2009). Travis asked if he could come with me next time; Tiny Tim promptly informed him he could not because I only took him and Matson (Field notes, November 6, 2009).

Tiny Tim sought my attention for different purposes. Sometimes he waved, or looked at me, to indicate he wanted me to come to his desk to help him with the work he had to do (Field notes, September 14, 23, 2009; field notes, October 5, 7, 9, 16, 30, 2009; field notes, November 2, 6, 9, 18, 19, 25, 2009; field notes, December 3, 11, 16, 2009; field notes, January 6, 13, 18, 20, 27, 2010; field notes, February 1, 2010). Other times, Tiny Tim tried to include me during math games (Field notes, November 16, 2009), and at recess when it was spent indoor (Field notes, January 6, 2010).

There was another aspect about our relationship; Tiny Tim wanted to learn French. During a number of conversations, he indicated he wanted me to teach him some French words (Field notes, November 6, 16, 2009; field notes, December 16, 2009). “What do you want to talk about today?”, I asked him at the beginning of a conversation; he replied, “The first thing that we’re going to do is learn French” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009). Tiny Tim had showed interest in Grade 1 in learning

French (Field notes, May 13, 20, 2009; field notes, June 4, 2009; Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, June 22, 25, 2009), and he continued in Grade 2.

**Hanging out with Tiny Tim.** Sometimes, Tiny Tim came to my desk and stood next to me; I worried his presence might bother his teacher (Field notes, October 28, 2009). One day, after the students played a letter game, a small group of them had the task to collect all the letters the children used for the game; while they cleaned up, Tiny Tim came to talk to me (Field notes, November 18, 2009). His teacher asked him what he was doing there; he answered, “I’m just staying out of the way” (Field notes, November 18, 2009). I believe Mrs. Henry did not approve of him standing next to me while his classmates were quietly sitting at their desks, but I did not sense Tiny Tim perceived his teacher’s disapproval like I did (Field notes, November 18, 2009).

Later in December, Mrs. Henry gave her students a worksheet on which they had to write a story about a little tree (Field notes, December 11, 2009). Tiny Tim who had been talking to me at my desk returned to his desk and pointed out to his teacher that he did not have a worksheet (Field notes, December 11, 2009). Mrs. Henry explained he did not have one because he had not stayed “where [he was] supposed to stay” (Field notes, December 11, 2009). When he visited me, Tiny Tim did not remain seated at his desk where I assumed his teacher wanted him to be. I perceived his visits to my desk were problematic with his teacher, but I never discussed it with her.

During the first part of the school year, Mrs. Henry gathered the children before lunch and took them to the main building to use the washroom and wash their hands. One day, while we walked down the hall to the washroom, Tiny Tim reached for my hand; at first, I felt uncomfortable because he was not in the line-up with the other



students, and I did not know if Mrs. Henry would approve of him being out of line (Field notes, November 2, 2009). I did not want my presence to disrupt the routine. A few days later, we were back in the hallway waiting for children to finish washing their hands. Mrs. Henry left with the majority of her students who were done, and I stayed behind to wait for the last ones; even though Tiny Tim was ready to go back to class, he chose to wait with me (Field notes, November 9, 2009). The following week, he held my hand again when returning to the classroom from the washroom (Field notes, November 16, 2009). I wondered if Tiny Tim's tendency to gravitate close to me would reach a point where Mrs. Henry found it disruptive. I believe we reached that point the next time I was in school. While we waited for the class to finish washing their hands, Tiny Tim came to talk to me; with a hand gesture, Mrs. Henry indicated to him he needed to go back to the line-up with his classmates (Field notes, November 18, 2009). I understood she did not want Tiny Tim chatting with me when he and his classmates were expected to line up silently in the hallway. I believed Mrs. Henry did not want her class to be noisy and disturb other classes, and that included Tiny Tim. I did not discuss this matter with Mrs. Henry. I figured she would indicate to Tiny Tim if his socializing with me was inappropriate. I wondered how Tiny Tim made sense of our relationship, and how he understood what was appropriate to do with me and what was not.

### **Discomfort with Tests—Tiny Tim**

During the time I spent with Tiny Tim, I learned he did not like tests. I first noticed it made him uncomfortable when I saw him hide his eyes while his teacher marked his spelling test (Field notes, October 9, 2009). He looked nervous and tense; he

smiled with relief when he heard Mrs. Henry say, *all good* (Field notes, October 9, 2009).

Later in November, Mrs. Henry gave the children offices<sup>90</sup> to put on their desks for a math test (Field notes, November 18, 2009). Toward the end of the test, Haden looked behind him; Mrs. Henry told him to turn around (Field notes, November 18, 2009).

When Tiny Tim was done, he turned his test in and he looked at his teacher; he seemed apprehensive (Field notes, November 18, 2009). He went to pick a book and came to my desk to read it with me (Field notes, November 18, 2009). I could tell he was anxious from the worried look on his face.

The next day, I was back in the classroom and had a conversation with Tiny Tim (Field notes, November 19, 2009). We talked about tests.

Sonia:            You don't like tests?

Tiny Tim:        Nope. . . .

Sonia:            Do you do well in tests?

Tiny Tim:        Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't . . . I don't really like tests.

They're my worst enemy. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim,  
November 19, 2009)

Early in December, the children practised for the spelling test; they played the game where girls were against boys (Field notes, December 3, 2009). When the practice was over, Mrs. Henry told her students to go to their desks and be ready for the spelling test (Field notes, December 3, 2009). Tiny Tim walked by my desk and said, "I hate spelling tests. I had only one wrong last time" (Field notes, December 3, 2009). I wished him

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<sup>90</sup> An office was a three-sided piece of cardboard the students used in a vertical position to isolate themselves during tests.

well and he left (Field notes, December 3, 2009). That same day, Tiny Tim and I had a conversation; we talked about spelling tests again (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, December 3, 2009).

Sonia: Do you think you'll have spelling tests in Bradford?

Tiny Tim: Oh, I will . . .

Sonia: Do you know why teachers make students do spelling tests?

Tiny Tim: To learn words. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, December 3, 2009)

Tiny Tim was convinced he would have to do spelling tests in his new school. He did not seem to look forward to that even though he thought they helped him learn words. In February, he had to study 50 words for a big spelling test; when he came home after the test, he told his mother, "Mom, you're not going to like that" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). He was upset because he had 19/30, Morgan told me (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2009). Tiny Tim practised his words every morning with his mother. He was disappointed with his score.

Later in April, Tiny Tim and I were talking while we walked by a fort he and his brother built the previous year (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, April 24, 2010). We talked about the his next school year; I reminded him about what he told me he did to be ready for Grade 1 and Grade 2 (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, April 24, 2010).

Sonia: What do you think you're going to do to get ready for Grade 3?

Tiny Tim: Well . . . Every school in every country does this math thing.

Sonia: Ok.

Tiny Tim: Math test and I hope they don't do it in Bradford.

Sonia: Why's that?

Tiny Tim: 'Cause it is a big test.

Sonia: So, it's a big test that they do everywhere and you don't want to do it?

Tiny Tim: No. (He sounds sorry.)

Sonia: Why? (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, April 24, 2010)

Tiny Tim did not answer me at that moment. I was surprised he was aware tests were done in other countries. We kept walking, and we talked about the test again.

Sonia: So, you think you're going to have to write a test?

Tiny Tim: Yeah.

Sonia: And you don't think it's going to be a good thing? It might be too long?

Tiny Tim: Uh huh.

Sonia: It takes a long time to write those?

Tiny Tim: If it's too long, my hands are going to get too sore, and they will get too hot . . . I'll get a B+.

Sonia: Oh, and you'll get a B+. Is a B+ good?

Tiny Tim: One wrong is B+, isn't it?

Sonia: I don't know.

Tiny Tim: Like . . . A+ is all right, B+ is two wrong.

Sonia: Oh, okay. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, April 24, 2010)

Tiny Tim was preoccupied with long tests. The CAT4 he did at the beginning of Grade 2 took a few days to write. I wondered if he was thinking about that test when he talked

about the length of it. He talked about marks and knew they corresponded to different numbers of wrong answers. There was a lot going on in his head, I thought.

### **Wanting to Play—Tiny Tim’s Lead—Tiny Tim and Sonia**

I noticed Tiny Tim’s interest in playing during our conversations. When we met the first time in Grade 2, we returned to the small room next to the library where we used to talk in Grade 1; he walked to the toys stored in that space and remembered using them during a conversation in Grade 1 (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, September 28, 2009). I asked him to return to the table and to finish his lunch so he would not be hungry (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, September 28, 2009). I reminded him we had limited time.

Sonia: But if you’re not done eating, you’re going to be hungry.

Tiny Tim: Oh, and I’ll miss half of my recess.

Sonia: Hmmm, what would you think of that?

Tiny Tim: Not happy.

Sonia: You wouldn’t be happy? You want to go for recess?

Tiny Tim: That’s the only time to go play, and first recess, second recess, after school. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, September 28, 2009)

During a subsequent conversation, Tiny Tim told me, “Playing sometimes helps me get the mood so I can keep on working and reading” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, October 16, 2009). Tiny Tim seemed to understand the benefits of play in helping prepare him to work. During another conversation later in November, while he drew on a piece of paper, I wondered if he was playing “tic-tac-toe”; he told me it was called “Xs and Os”

(Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, November 19, 2009). We set up the game, chose different crayons to write, and Tiny Tim suggested we play “rock-paper-scissors” to see who would go first (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, November 16, 2009). I started and put an X down in the top right corner.

Tiny Tim:     Hmmm, lucky you didn’t pick the centre!

Sonia:         You like the centre?

Tiny Tim:     Yep, it’s my favourite spot! (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, November 16, 2009)

Playing tic-tac-toe with Tiny Tim that day helped me see his interest in the game and his knowledge on how he played it.

Just before the Christmas break, I tried to have Tiny Tim focus on our conversation but he was attracted to the toys in our meeting room (Field notes, December 16, 2009). I was cognizant that I did not have a lot of time left to spend in the classroom with him and that there were only a few conversations to have before I would leave the school. I wanted to know as much as I could about him. I asked if he remembered what he liked to play in Kindergarten, in an effort to use his focus on the toys to help me know more about him; he told me, “sandbox, building, everything there, . . . mostly everything I liked” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, December 16, 2009).

On our return from the holiday break, I suggested to Tiny Tim to go around the school and take pictures of what he wanted; he agreed (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, January 8, 2010). We stopped by his Kindergarten classroom where he took pictures of his favourite centre; he remembered where specific centres used to be (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, January 8, 2010). We continued our walk around the school. We stopped at

the school's meeting place, a big room occupied by a day program for pre-schoolers. There were many toys in different centres, similar to what there is in a Kindergarten classroom. Tiny Tim enjoyed playing there for a moment; he asked me to take pictures of him reading at the reading centre, talking on the phone at the house centre, and with his *favourite thing*—a stuffed animal (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, January 8, 2010). I eventually managed to convince him to leave the room and finish our school tour. I realized that day how much he wanted to play.

Tiny Tim played again when we met the following time; it was his birthday (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, January 15, 2010). We talked for a while. I could tell he was tired. At one point, he told me, "I just want to play" (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, January 15, 2010). We talked some more before he found a toy syringe and pretended he was a doctor and I was his patient (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, January 15, 2010). During the following conversation, Tiny Tim remembered he never went to the office to pick his birthday treat; I offered to go with him and we went before he started taking more pictures in the school (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, January 20, 2010). We stopped by the preschool room again where he asked me to take more pictures of him playing with toys; I said, "Okay, Tiny Tim, you know what? Yes, we take pictures, we don't play today, okay?" (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, January 20, 2010). He responded to my request with a whimper (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, January 20, 2010); his response helped me remember how my work was about hearing his voice (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, January 20, 2010). I think he made it clear to me what he wanted to tell me at that moment. He reminded me of the relationship we had; it was not only about a researcher collecting data, but also about a young boy who wanted to play,

and who saw his relationship with me as a time when we could play, when his voice would be heard.

We later left the preschool room and walked by the gymnasium where his classmates were playing basketball; he had decided to come with me instead of going for his gym class (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, January 20, 2010). I assumed he decided to miss gym that day because he knew February was coming soon and was aware I would stop going to his class. He looked through the window of the gymnasium door.

Tiny Tim: Oh man, it's basketball.

Sonia: Do you want to change your mind?

Tiny Tim: Well, I'll have tomorrow. . . .

Sonia: You're giving up a lot!

Tiny Tim: Always. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, January 20, 2010)

We continued to walk around the school while he played with the small toy he received as a birthday treat from the office staff member that morning; we walked by the gymnasium once more and that time, he chose to join his class to play basketball (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, January 20, 2010). His desire to play with toys and play in the gymnasium remained strong from the beginning of our relationship until I left the classroom.

## **Being Young and Small—Morgan**

**Informing Mrs. Henry.** When Tiny Tim started Grade 2, Morgan made sure her son sat in the front of the classroom to see everything since he was smaller than many



students were in his class (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). I asked her if she had talked to Mrs. Henry about her son's Grade 1 year; Morgan said:

No, hmmm, I do want to go in and talk to her, but we'll see if she's aware of how old he is, right? 'Cause I think that's going to be a factor for him because of the fact that there's kids in his class that are a year and a half older than him . . .

Paige's birthday is in December. She's going to be 8, and Tiny Tim is just turning 7 . . . There's a broad age spectrum. I don't know if she's aware that he may take longer to catch onto things because of his age and maybe his attention span is not there totally because of that aspect . . . I was waiting [for] Meet the Teacher Night, [but] it's not until the 22<sup>nd</sup> . . . I might have to go and talk to her after school one day, [and] leave the kids on the playground. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009)

Morgan was preoccupied by her son's young age in comparison to his classmates. She wanted to inform his teacher about it and help her understand why he might require more time to do what the other children do. I believe Morgan felt confident about talking to Mrs. Henry; "She's open to talk to you and discuss things", she told me (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009). She added, "It will be interesting to see how he handles being probably the youngest kid in his class this year" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, September 10, 2009).

When Morgan met Mrs. Henry at Meet the Teacher Night, she indicated to her that Tiny Tim needed to "be in the front of the class . . . He's so small, you can't put him behind a big kid 'cause then, he can't see . . . and he needs to see" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October, 9, 2009). Mrs. Henry told Morgan she would move Tiny Tim's desk if

needed. Morgan and Jay shared information about Tiny Tim after Mrs. Henry asked parents to share what they thought she should know about their child. Morgan said, “We wrote up about his age, and how he’s you know. He’s a . . . little bit more sensitive, and he tends to get picked on ‘cause he’s younger” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October, 9, 2009). Morgan recalled Mrs. Henry saying she did not see the other children picking on him but commented on his age: “It does explain a few things, why he’s a little slower” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October 9, 2009).

**Younger in his class.** Later in December, Morgan was discussing Tiny Tim’s report card, his test results, and the standardized testing. She referred to his age: “You look at my Tiny Tim who was born in January, and you compare him to somebody who’s a year older, born in February, in the same grade” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009). Morgan was aware of the different ages between students of the same grade and wondered about the impact it had on the test results. She brought up their decision to register Tiny Tim in Grade 1 even though he was born in January:

We made the decision to put him [in Grade 1], you know. I look at this (the test results), and I’m going . . . [Did] we make the right decision? . . . But then, I look at how well he’s grown just in the last three months . . . We may regret it when he’s in high school and he’s struggling. I don’t know . . . But if we work with him at home, there should be no reason why . . . (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009)

My sense was Tiny Tim’s younger age in comparison to his classmates preoccupied Morgan. She figured they would work with him so he would not struggle. She was

happy to share that Tiny Tim was excited because his birthday was coming up, and he would be 7, like the others in his class (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009).

**Understanding, not excusing.** In February, after Morgan talked about how they started to read to their sons when they were babies, I asked her if she was shocked to see Tiny Tim not progress as fast as other children were; she replied she always needed to remember that he is younger than the other children are (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). She also talked about Tiny Tim's teachers who classified their students by their age, like the *younger set*, and how she wanted that to be different because she felt it might influence her son to start feeling like that (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). She wanted the teachers to know he was younger, but she did not want them to use it as an excuse (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). She added, "It may help explain things. That just means that he may have to work a little harder, and I have no issues with helping him work a little harder" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010).

**Moving on.** The last time I met Morgan for a conversation before their move to Bradford, she raised the age issue once more. She talked about how she perceived him as a *B student*:

I figured he'd be a *B student* . . . which is fine (she hesitates) . . . 'cause I mean, he's on the young side . . . and he will be the youngest in his Grade [3] . . . 'cause they do calendar year . . . I'm going to put him in a Grade 3 . . . They do birthdays—January to January<sup>91</sup>. So all the kids are going to be 8 when he gets

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<sup>91</sup> In the province where the family is moving, school children have to be 6 years of age by January 1<sup>st</sup> to register in Grade 1.

there . . . I'm not worried. Every year I talk to the teachers; I say . . . "If you don't think he's ready, I need to know 'cause these are the years that I can make the change" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, June 30, 2010).

Morgan explained her decision to register Tiny Tim in Grade 3. She seemed confident that he would do well, considering she and Jay would be there to help him if needed. However, she did not exclude the possibility of moving him to another grade if his teacher felt he was not *ready*.

### **Responding to Morgan's Age Concerns—Mrs. Henry**

At the end of the school year, I went to the school to visit the children and Mrs. Henry one last time before they moved on to their summer plans. She shared with me how she felt Tiny Tim did not progress as she had hoped; she wondered if his parents worked with him at home (Field notes, June 23, 2010). I told her they did; she remarked Morgan often said her son was "the youngest" (Field notes, June 23, 2010). Mrs. Henry had known "youngest of families and they were strong" (Field notes, June 23, 2010), she noted. I do not believe Mrs. Henry saw Tiny Tim's younger age as a limit to what he could do in Grade 2. During the months I spent in her class, she never referred to his age during our conversations.

### **Anticipating the Move—Morgan, Tiny Tim**

One morning early in the school year, Tiny Tim's mother, Morgan, shared with me they might be moving but that it would not be until next year (Field notes, September 23, 2009). Her husband travelled regularly for work, and there was a possibility for him to work in a different city where he would not have to travel as much. When I took Tiny

Tim for a conversation a few days later, he told me about the move; “I’d like to tell you we’re going to be really moving, so I won’t see . . . I won’t probably know until Wednesday, if we’re moving” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, September 28, 2009). I asked him where they were planning to live; he mentioned Bradford, in a different province (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, September 28, 2009).

Tiny Tim: [Bradford] has a diving board and a pool.

Sonia: That would be fun. How do you feel about moving?

Tiny Tim: Not really happy.

Sonia: You’re not really happy. You’re happy and not happy?

Tiny Tim: Uh huh.

Sonia: You have mixed feelings?

Tiny Tim: Because I want to go to the pool, and it’s warmer there, the beach and meet new friends. I just don’t want to leave Josh alone.

Sonia: Yeah, you’re going to be leaving him alone. Does he have other friends?

Tiny Tim: Probably one. All he has for other friends is this other friend. I can’t remember, since Grade 1 . . .

Sonia: Do you think Josh would make new friends?

Tiny Tim: I don’t know if he will. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, September 28, 2009)

Tiny Tim seemed to have reservations about moving. He worried his friend Josh might not make new friends once he would be gone. I believe Tiny Tim’s parents tried to help him imagine how it would be to live in Bradford. They talked about the weather and the

activities they could do there. Tiny Tim seemed interested in the new place, but he also worried about his friend Josh.

Moving was certainly on Morgan's mind as well. She talked about painting the railings in the kitchen (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October 9, 2009). She prepared the house for when it would be time to put it up for sale. She referred to their move again, later in our conversation, when I shared how inclusive and friendly Tiny Tim was with Haden, a new student in the class.

That's good, yeah, that's good because . . . at this point, we had already started talking about us moving, and I said, "So you think about how you want to be treated when you go to a new school" . . . That's good to know. I knew he was really excited about [Haden] starting and him being another boy. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, October 9, 2009)

I noticed Tiny Tim's welcoming attitude with Haden the day he arrived in Mrs. Henry's class. Tiny Tim asked Haden if he wanted to play with him at recess (Field notes, September 30, 2009). From what his mother mentioned to me, Tiny Tim and his family discussed how it might feel to be a new student in a school, and how he could help Haden make the transition. Morgan was also preoccupied with finding a *good* school district for her sons; her husband suggested they check the Fraser Institute<sup>92</sup> (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009). When she researched schools, Morgan learned students had to be 5 years old by January 1<sup>st</sup> to enter Kindergarten (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009). That meant she could register Tiny Tim either in Grade 2 because he

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<sup>92</sup> Morgan and Jay referred to the Fraser Institute, a Canadian research and educational organization that uses "publicly-available data to rank and compare schools" (<http://www.fraserinstitute.org/report-cards/school-performance/overview.aspx>). Parents sometimes refer to the institute to learn about schools.

was born on January 15<sup>th</sup> or in Grade 3 because he would have done Grade 2 already (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009).

During a conversation with Tiny Tim, we discussed the spelling test he did that morning; he told me he did not know how to write *Bradford* (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, December 3, 2009). That word was not on the spelling test; I asked Tiny Tim what made him think about that word, but he did not know (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, December 3, 2009). I wondered how often during the day, Tiny Tim drifted into thinking about their move.

Later in February, Morgan told me her two sons were “apprehensive about the move . . . everything is up in turmoil right now. We don’t know what’s happening when . . . And we try not to talk about it too much” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). The family had many unanswered questions about the move, and even though they tried not to talk about it too often, Morgan felt her sons worried about it.

By the end of March, the final details of the move were still unknown. Morgan recalled her husband asking Tiny Tim if he worried about the move, after there had been a few incidents involving him at school; their son apparently did not worry about moving and was looking forward to it (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). At the end of April, Tiny Tim and I went on a walk in a park in his town; he told me, “One half of a month and then we’re done school and then we move . . . We still have lots of time though” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, April 24, 2010). I sensed he knew the school year end represented the time they would leave to go live in the Bradford. While we walked, I said to him, “You’re going to have to find a new park in Bradford” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, April 24, 2010). He replied, “Yeah, I’m going to miss this place, and

the children who live close, and . . . our fort and everything” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, April 24, 2010). Tiny Tim expressed nostalgia at the thought of moving. He seemed to understand what it meant to move from the town he knew to a new place.

Before the school year ended, I went to watch Tiny Tim play soccer; his mother informed me they would be moving in July, and they had found a school (Field notes, June 15, 2010). Morgan talked about a pool party she was organizing after the last day of school to celebrate her eldest son’s birthday and as a farewell to the boys’ friends (Field notes, June 15, 2010). Morgan and Jay wanted to make sure their sons could say goodbye to their friends and have fun with them once more.

### **After the First Report Card—Tiny Tim**

After the first report card, I asked Tiny Tim if he knew what a report card was; he said, “Yep . . . They send how good you’re doing” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, December 3, 2009). I told him my daughter looked at her report card on the bus on her way home, and he said, “You can lose it” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, December 3, 2009). I asked if he looked at it on the bus; he replied, “No . . . I can’t even read good” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, December 3, 2009). We talked more about his report card. I asked him what he was good at, and he said, “I’m good at reading, but I have to practise on some” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, December 3, 2009). Later during our conversation, Tiny Tim told me he liked school; he added, “The only thing I don’t like at school is reading” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, December 3, 2009). We did not discuss this further that day. I wondered what he meant by *reading*? How did he understand reading at school? Which activities did he associate with reading?



## After the First Report Card—Morgan

I met with Tiny Tim’s mother that same day. She mentioned Tiny Tim liked school (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009). Morgan noted Mrs. Henry “teaches an orderly class . . . and that tends to really help Tiny Tim. He likes it quiet. He likes to be able to work and doesn’t like to be bugged” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009). She appreciated Mrs. Henry’s structured class and credited her teaching style for how well the students behaved when she accompanied them on a fieldtrip (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009).

Morgan showed me her son’s report card and his CAT4<sup>93</sup> results (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009). She first talked about the CAT4 results the teacher shared with them during the student-led conference (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009). She was surprised to see how low his reading score was but was relieved with his higher score in math (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009). She talked about the grading; “It’s a scale score of some sort. So *low* (she reads), does it meet end-of-grade expectation? Well, no kidding! He hasn’t finished Grade 2 yet” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009). Morgan was frustrated with the results her son had on the CAT4 test. She did not understand how they could refer to *end of year expectations* when the children wrote the test in mid-September (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009). She was confused and mentioned the results were not explained to her. Morgan knew her son’s reading skills needed to develop but

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<sup>93</sup> The CAT4 is the 4th edition of the Canadian Achievement Tests (CAT) which assesses skills in reading, language, spelling, and mathematics. Mrs. Henry told me it was compulsory for all Grade 2 students in the district (Field notes, September 14, 2009).

questioned the pertinence of the test since it did not seem to make sense in respect to time (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009).

During the conferences, Morgan took Tiny Tim to the book fair the school organized at that time; he bought a chapter book and “started reading it the first day”, she noted (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009). She talked about how Tiny Tim recognized words and started to read with fluency; she believed he made progress (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009). However, the report card stated, “He has difficulty with [reading] comprehension” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009). I sensed Morgan’s tension as she tried to make sense of the comment on the report card, the test results, and what she noticed at home when she watched Tiny Tim read.

### **On Reporting and Testing—Mrs. Henry**

I met Mrs. Henry at the end of October. She talked about Tiny Tim; she said, “He tries hard . . . Oh, he’s a cute little guy” (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, October 28, 2009). She was surprised by his result on the reading test and noted:

He might have been just a little more anxious about it and perhaps didn’t take time and do his best . . . I did think Tiny Tim would do better because . . . you can tell that he studies his reading words at home ‘cause when we play that Smarties Game, he usually . . . it’s no problem. (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, October 28, 2009)

Mrs. Henry expected Tiny Tim to do better on the reading test and wondered if he was anxious or if he rushed it. She assumed he studied words at home because he did well at the Smarties Game.

I went to her house early in January for another conversation. I asked her how she thought Tiny Tim was doing (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, January 10, 2010). She said she wanted to retest him with:

more of a diagnostic test and see . . . He came out lower than I thought . . . and yet, it may be that he's test shy, which some kids are . . . Orally, he doesn't do too badly . . . when he reads . . . out loud. (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, January 10, 2010).

Mrs. Henry wanted to test Tiny Tim's reading; she mentioned she liked the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test® (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, January 10, 2010). She knew not everyone liked it, but she felt it gave her a picture of a child's performance and thought that was helpful (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, January 10, 2010). She said she wanted to start testing the students but found it was a problem to find the time as she needed to pull children out to do the test (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, January 10, 2010). I later asked Mrs. Henry if she needed to test her students to know how they were doing.

Sonia: As a teacher, do you feel you need to measure [the children] with a test [to know how they're doing]?

Mrs. Henry: No.

Sonia: You know how they're doing?

Mrs. Henry: I know how they're doing but sometimes, for other people . . . it's all back up really.

Sonia: Okay.

Mrs. Henry: To protect yourself, I think . . . It's all justification. (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, January 10, 2010)

We did not discuss Tiny Tim's results during that conversation. Mrs. Henry told me she did not need to test her students to know how they did in Grade 2. She tested them to have evidence about their skills and knowledge. If test results came out considerably different from her informal assessment, she took note and inquired into them (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, January 9, 2012).

### **Talking about Books—Tiny Tim**

Tiny Tim returned a book I lent him one day; when I read that book to the class, he chose to do a worksheet his classmates had completed while we had a conversation instead (Field notes, January 10, 2010). When he gave me the book back, he asked, "Which is your favourite picture in the book?" (Field notes, January 11, 2010). He left to go to the gym before I could say anything (Field notes, January 11, 2010). His question, in my opinion, showed his engagement with the book and his knowledge of the relational aspect of talking about books.

When I met with Tiny Tim on his birthday, it was an exciting day; he turned 7, and it was the day the Olympic torch passed through his town (Field notes, January 15, 2010). During our meeting, I asked Tiny Tim about reading in school:

Sonia: When you're at school, do you like to read?

Tiny Tim: Sometimes I do. . . .

Sonia: First thing in the morning, do you like to read?

Tiny Tim: Sometimes I do . . . . I like to read with somebody . . .

Sonia: You said you'd like to read with a friend?

Tiny Tim: Yes, like you.

Sonia: Oh, a big friend . . . Do you remember in Grade 1, you used to read with a friend?

Tiny Tim: Yes.

Sonia: Mrs. Taylor [asked] you to read with a partner. Do you remember that? You know, there was copycat reading.

Tiny Tim: Yes, I do.

Sonia: Is that the kind of reading you'd like to do?

Tiny Tim: Yes, I would. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, January 15, 2010)

Tiny Tim sometimes liked to read at school; he liked to read with me, but he also indicated he would like to read with a classmate as he did in Grade 1.

When I met Tiny Tim at the end of January, we talked about the book *Thank you Mr. Falker* by Patricia Polacco that I had read to the class on a previous day (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, January 27, 2010).

Sonia: I was wondering what you thought of this book.

Tiny Tim: Eeek! . . . This one is the one I didn't like.

Sonia: You didn't like that book?

Tiny Tim: It was sad . . . like right there. (He shows me a picture where Trisha, the main character, cries because children called her names

and laughed at her). That one I liked. That was a cool one. (The picture shows Trisha's grandpa putting honey on a book and asking her to taste it).

Sonia: Yeah, have you ever heard of people putting honey on a book?

Tiny Tim: I haven't.

Sonia: Me neither. The grandma (We look at a picture of Trisha with her grandma, looking at the stars).

Tiny Tim: They died. (He refers to Trisha's grandparents.)

Sonia: Yeah, they died . . .

Tiny Tim: She (the grandmother) didn't want to say heaven 'cause that'd be scary to the girl. This would be sad. (The author referred to the stars as the light of heaven coming from the other side, where everyone goes one day).

Sonia: Oh, that would scare the girl. I never thought about it.

Tiny Tim: Yeah . . . This page . . . I didn't like her face . . . It's creepy looking. (The picture where Trisha cries because children laughed at her).

Sonia: Is it? What makes it creepy?

Tiny Tim: The eyes, the red . . . It feels freaky . . . It was this one, freakier! She has longer hair, and it's dark, and a dress, and her hand, right? 'Cause it's black, kind of. (The picture shows Trisha hiding under the inside stairwell). And him, [he] has short hair (He points to a boy who laughed at Trisha before and who found her hiding), and

he's really good (He refers to Mr. Falker, the teacher, on another page)

Sonia: He looks happy, doesn't he?

Tiny Tim: Uh huh.

Sonia: And here, what does she look like?

Tiny Tim: Sad. (He looks at a picture where Trisha is in front of the class, and we see a boy laughing at her.)

Sonia: Have you ever seen that happen, kids laughing like that at other kids?

Tiny Tim: Yes, I have . . . millions of times at Ramsey School . . .

Sonia: [Can] you tell me a little more about this?

Tiny Tim: I'll tell you next time . . .

Sonia: Has it happened to you? . . . Have you seen it happen to other people?

Tiny Tim: Nope . . .

Sonia: So, you did not like this book because it was

Tiny Tim: Scary . . . This one . . . I liked him. (He points to Mr. Falker who is running toward the boy who found Trisha hiding.)

Sonia: Yes. . . . [Mr. Falker] came to her rescue, right? . . . When I read that book, I felt sad too because I kept thinking about my daughter.

Tiny Tim: That's what happened to your daughter?

Sonia: Well . . .

Tiny Tim: She couldn't read that good, right?

Sonia: Yes, and I think she felt dumb, and it's not a good feeling when you feel dumb. Have you ever felt dumb?

Tiny Tim: Not that much. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, January 27, 2010)

Tiny Tim was talkative about the book I read in class and brought for our conversation. The author's pictures were dramatic and along with the story, they seemed to capture Tiny Tim's interest. He talked about children laughing at children at his school but did not give me specific examples of when it happened. He wanted to talk about it *next time*. When I shared how I felt when I read the book, he remembered my daughter's story; I had told him before. He referred to her, as *she couldn't read that good*, the same comment he made in December when I asked him if he read his report card on the bus. I asked if he felt dumb before; he said, *not that much*. I wondered about his choice of words—*not that much*. Did he feel dumb sometimes? And if he did, was it because he *couldn't read that good*, or was there something else making him feel dumb?

### **Attending to Tiny Tim the Reader—Later in the Year—Morgan**

I met Morgan at the beginning of February, a few days before I ended my school visits. I asked her how Tiny Tim's reading was; she said:

Actually, I find it's improved . . . I am finding that his fluency is getting better . . . [When] he's reading a book, he's starting to make comments now . . . He'll say to me [when] I'll go help, "No mom, I can do it". (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010).



Morgan told me she reads when her sons watch cartoons; she likes them to see her read because she loves to read (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). She felt it was important to show them that. We continued to talk about what Tiny Tim read.

He got a couple of chapter books for Christmas . . . He bought the *Stink book* through Scholastic®, the *Stink series* . . . They're easy readers. They're chapter books, but they're pretty easy thing to read, like, most words he should know. And he reads it sometimes in bed, himself, before he goes to [sleep]. And he says "Come on mom, I'm just about done" . . . I don't know if he's actually reading it. I'm sure he's picking out words that he knows. He's going through the process of sounding things out . . . Whether he's actually grasping what he's reading. I told Jay, "You know what, the good thing is he'll be able to go back, maybe next year, and read them and understand them and know all the words". But he thinks it's great . . . He sits in, and he gets his stuffed animals lined up, and he reads to them and plays school, and I find that he's come a long way. And he'll grab a book of Luke's and he'll try to read it . . . Or if we're out and about, often he'll go "Mom, what does this mean?", and he'll read the word. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010)

Morgan felt her son's reading was improving. She talked about him reading chapter books in bed, on his own, and reading to his stuffed animals. She also shared he tried to read words when they went out and ventured to read his brother's books as well. She mentioned her husband Jay was "really impressed with how far he's come" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010).

Morgan persistently tried to expose Tiny Tim to reading material; she talked about finding games on the computer that made him read (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). She explained what Tiny Tim did when they played one of the computer games; “He loves to help, so he reads the little lists of words at the bottom, [and] he tells me what we need to find” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). Morgan spent time and energy reading with Tiny Tim and finding activities he liked; she wanted her son to know reading *can be fun* (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010).

### **Becoming a Writer—Later in the Year—Tiny Tim**

In mid-January, the day the Olympic torch came by the town, Tiny Tim wrote in his journal: *I was weally excited I almost forgot it was my birthday* (Field notes, January 15, 2010). When he pronounced *really*, he said, *weally*, as he spelled it, which made sense to him. I remembered Mrs. Henry noticing the same thing earlier in October (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, October 28, 2009). When I met Tiny Tim at the end of January, we looked at the pictures he took earlier when we went for a tour of the school (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, January 27, 2010). I had taped each picture on a separate page and put them in a binder. We flipped through the pages; Tiny Tim decided to write on some of them (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, January 27, 2010). On a picture of a fireplace he took in the front foyer, he wrote, *Fiyre plas made of pepre in the medingpase*. I read aloud, “Fire place made of paper in the meeting place”, and I said, “Good! Wow!” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, January 27, 2010). He then said to me, “I’m a really good writer” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, January 27, 2010). Even

though he did not spell with standard spelling all the time, his temporary<sup>94</sup> spelling often made sense. I believed Tiny Tim was progressing and, from his comment, I thought he felt the same way when he said he was a *really good* writer.

At the end of April, I met Tiny Tim and showed him some comments he made from Grade 1. It was about him feeling sore when he wrote: “It’s hard to copy off a page. It hurts my head, back, neck, hand” (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, April 24, 2010).

Tiny Tim carried on:

Tiny Tim: And also Grade 2 . . .

Sonia: Do you? . . . When you write, do you feel sore?

Tiny Tim: My hands are sore . . .

Sonia: You said it was hard to copy off a page.

Tiny Tim: Yes, it’s still too hard . . . and this is the page. You write so tiny . . . My bones would get too slippery, and there’s sweat. The pencil will fall out of my hands and then my hand starts [to be] really hot.

(Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, April 24, 2010)

Tiny Tim remembered how he felt when he wrote in Grade 1. He thought it was still physically demanding to write in Grade 2 and described how his hand felt sore and sweaty.

When I visited the class at the end of June, the children were writing in their journals (Field notes, June 23, 2010). I walked around the class to look at their writing; I stopped by Tiny Tim’s desk; he told me he improved his writing and said he could write

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<sup>94</sup> The terms “temporary” or “invented” spelling refer to children’s “early spellings [that] can be thought of as approximations or experimentations with sounds, patterns, and meanings of words” (Bainbridge, Haydon & Malicky, 2009, p. 320).

small words now (Field notes, June 23, 2010). We counted the number of lines he wrote, and he looked very proud of what he did (Field notes, June 23, 2010). I think the comment Tiny Tim made about writing small words referred to how he could print smaller than what he used to be able to do. For Tiny Tim, writing small and filling many lines with words seemed to represent success in writing.

### **Parenting a Young Speller—Later in the Year—Morgan**

When I met Morgan at her house at the end of June, she talked about the Stanley journal<sup>95</sup> the children brought home along with the stuffed dog I gave the class; she commented on the spelling in it (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, June 30, 2010). She talked to Tiny Tim about word wall words<sup>96</sup>; she told him, “It should never be spelled wrong in any of your writing ‘cause they’re on the wall. ‘I’m not allowed to look’, he said . . . Yes you are. You’re not allowed to look during spelling tests” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, June 30, 2010). I told Morgan it must have been confusing for Tiny Tim and she agreed (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, June 30, 2010). She added her son noted, “The words are all behind me mom” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, June 30, 2010); she told him to “turn around” to which he replied, “I’m not allowed to turn around” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, June 30, 2010). Haden had been told not to turn around, I remembered. Did Tiny Tim think he could never turn around? When Morgan discussed strategies for

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<sup>95</sup> The last day I was in Mrs. Henry’s classroom, I offered the class a book titled *Stanley’s Party*. I had read that book to the children as well as others from the *Stanley* series. Stanley, a big dog, had become a favourite character among the children and I. I also gave the class a stuffed dog representing Stanley (Field notes, February 8, 2010). I learned later, while talking with Marie, that the children in Mrs. Henry’s class took turns taking the book, the stuffed dog, and a journal to their homes; they were asked to write about their visit with Stanley in the journal (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010).

<sup>96</sup> Word wall words consisted of a number of short words permanently displayed in the classroom in an alphabetical order. The students were expected to always spell these words correctly since they were easily accessible.

spelling correctly with Tiny Tim, he did not think he could refer to visual aids in the classroom. She tried to tell him he could but he seemed convinced he was not allowed. She wondered about the point of having the words up if he could not use them (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, June 30, 2010).

### **Communicating—Trying to Be Heard—Morgan**

In February, Morgan and I discussed how reading was taught in schools in general. Morgan seemed to feel she did not know much about what was happening in Tiny Tim's class; "I'm not in the classroom this year so I don't know what it's all about anymore . . . Because I'm not in Mrs. Henry's class, I don't know how she does it" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). Morgan added:

I don't know if she would be welcoming for me to come in and help one day . . .

In Mrs. Taylor's class, I could be productive and do stuff, and I've offered . . . She doesn't want help, right? . . . That's one way for me to be into the classroom, to be able to see what's going on . . . She doesn't like to be pushed on, like, I don't want to push myself on her. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010)

I believe Morgan would have liked to help in her son's class. She did not know what was happening in his class and did not feel Mrs. Henry wanted help. She added she did not know much about how Tiny Tim was doing academically; she said, "She doesn't talk to me about him" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). During the same conversation, Morgan shared how she did not receive feedback from Mrs. Henry.

Morgan: [I] don't get feedback from her.

Sonia: Did you get feedback from other teachers previous years . . .?

Morgan: Yeah, 'cause I'd go in . . . and ask, right?

Sonia: Okay.

Morgan: But I don't feel that she's approachable because I've approached her on some other things . . . and she's just kind of dismissive, hmmm, or she makes it out that it's not a big deal. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010)

We continued the conversation and discussed an incident that took place a couple of weeks earlier. I had stayed in at lunch because Mrs. Henry needed to step out for a few minutes (Field notes, January 13, 2010). Tiny Tim went to the bathroom and when he came back, I went to his desk to chat with him; he pointed to his knee showing me a wet spot on his pants (Field notes, January 13, 2010).

Tiny Tim: Look, wet knee.

Sonia: Did you slip on your way to the bathroom<sup>97</sup>?

Tiny Tim: No, a teenager dunked me. (Field notes, January 13, 2010)

I explained to Tiny Tim that he needed to tell his teacher or a school administrator what happened; he told me he did not want to do that (Field notes, January 13, 2010). I tried to convince him that he should report it. Shortly after, Mrs. Henry came back to the classroom (Field notes, January 13, 2010). Shelby, who sat nearby Tiny Tim and who heard our conversation, told Mrs. Henry what happened to Tiny Tim (Field notes, January 13, 2010). Mrs. Henry came to talk to him; he told her the teenager pushed him (Field notes, January 13, 2010). Mrs. Henry said they needed to go talk to Mr. Smith, a

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<sup>97</sup> Mrs. Henry's classroom was in a portable and her students had to go outside to reach the school's main building where the washrooms were.

school administrator<sup>98</sup>; at that point, Tiny Tim started to cry and left with his teacher (Field notes, January 13, 2010). On my way out of the school, I stopped by the office to talk to Mr. Smith; he and Tiny Tim were looking out the window pointing at teenagers (Field notes, January 13, 2010). Mr. Smith asked if the teenager who pushed him had a colourful jacket; Tiny Tim said, “Yes” (Field notes, January 13, 2010). Mr. Smith asked Tiny Tim, “Do you want me to chase him?” to which Tiny Tim responded, “Yes” (Field notes, January 13, 2010). As Tiny Tim was leaving, Mr. Smith laughed (Field notes, January 13, 2010). I caught up to Tiny Tim who was walking back to his class and asked if he was okay but he did not stop walking; I noticed tears in his eyes (Field notes, January 13, 2010). He went across the gymnasium to go to his classroom, and I left the school wondering how he felt about the incident and how it was addressed.

During a conversation with Morgan in early February, we discussed the incident involving the teenager. Morgan explained how she talked to Mrs. Henry about it but felt she “wrote it off” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). Morgan seemed frustrated because office staff members told her they could not see anything on the video<sup>99</sup>, and she did not think they believed her son was pushed (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). Morgan did not understand how they could not see anything as the camera was installed to record what happened where Tiny Tim met the teenager. She seemed irritated with the situation (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). She said to me, “It [was] the same thing last year when Travis choked Tiny Tim in the bathroom. . . . It was kind of brushed off, right?” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February

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<sup>98</sup> Mr. Smith is a pseudonym.

<sup>99</sup> There was a video camera installed near the door where Tiny Tim met the teenager. Morgan asked office staff members to review the video footage of the day of the incident.

1, 2010). She recalled asking Mr. Smith why she was not notified about the incident in the washroom; she was told they did not really know what happened (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). She remembered telling Mr. Smith Tiny Tim was scared to go anywhere near Travis (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). That was the reason that made Morgan want to talk to Mrs. Henry when she saw Travis sitting right next to Tiny Tim in September (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). Morgan shared she liked Mrs. Henry as a teacher and appreciated how she managed the classroom but seemed to agree with her friend, who had children in her class, about how they felt she tended to “brush things off, like, . . . it’s not a big deal” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). The stories Morgan and Tiny Tim told of the incidents around his safety in school were not taken seriously, according to Morgan.

Tiny Tim said to his mother that his teacher:

was not always nice . . . He likes her and he thinks she’s . . . a good teacher, but he doesn’t necessarily like what she does sometimes . . . He’s scared to talk to her about things ‘cause I said, “Mrs. Henry said [you could tell her]” and he goes, “Oh no mom, I can’t talk to Mrs. Henry about it” . . . I’m like, “You have to”.

“No mom”, [he said]. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010).

Morgan wanted Tiny Tim to tell his teacher when something happened to him but he did not seem to think he could do that. She thought he was scared to talk to her. Morgan shared she knew Mrs. Henry’s husband had serious health issues; she recognized it was “stressful for her . . . She’s probably not in a good space”, she told me (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010).



## Parenting a Young Reader—Mid-Year—Morgan

**Accounting.** After the reporting period in December, Morgan shared how well Tiny Tim was doing, and how he had read 53 books by then, including one chapter book (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009). She described how they had to account for the books her son read, and how they felt about it:

[It's] not number of nights, it's books. [Mrs. Henry] doesn't do nights . . . Mrs. Taylor did nights . . . If [he] picked a bigger book, I always split it in half, and I wrote it down on both nights. I wrote *Part 1* and *Part 2*. This [was] what Mrs. Taylor said to do, right? Mrs. Henry said, "No, you don't write that book until it's done". I'm thinking he only got credit for one book when he read that chapter book. I don't know if she realized that it was a chapter book . . . Most nights he would read another book and he'd read a chapter of his book. That's what he wanted to do. That's okay but there were some nights . . . all he wanted to do [was] . . . read two chapters in his book. You can't write that down . . . but . . . he strives for the stickers. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009)

Morgan pointed out again how Tiny Tim read other books for the purpose of filling out his reading sheet, even though he was interested in reading a chapter book; she believed it frustrated him, because at times, he only wanted to read his chapter book.

In general, Morgan was happy with her son's reading; she believed he was *coming along*. Tiny Tim usually read to his mother in the family room, but when Jay was

in town, it was special; they broke from the routine and sat in the living room by themselves (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 3, 2009).

**Shifting the reading schedule.** In February, Morgan reported Tiny Tim did not regularly read during the month of January; her husband was out of town, and she had health problems that required her to lay down (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). She added:

We've started back at it. He's been reading two books a night again, but for about a month there, we kind of slacked. Christmas holidays, and it was warm, so they would literally get home from school and they're out the door. And to be honest, I'd rather [him] go do that then make him sit and read. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010)

Morgan decided her son could skip reading when it was nice outside so he could have more time to play instead of having him stay inside and read. Her health condition seemed to be a challenge at times. Because she had to lay down more than the usual, she could not attend to her son's reading as diligently as she had in the past.

**Reading and rewards.** Morgan explained to me that she wanted her sons to read because it can be *fun*, not just for homework (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). She made a point to show her sons she read; she wanted them "to see that reading can be enjoyable . . . It's one place where your imagination can just go . . . You can just get lost in a book" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). She said Tiny Tim told her it was "fun pretending to be someone else" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010) when reading books. I asked Morgan if, in general, she found schools taught children to enjoy literature; she said, "No, I don't think so . . . . To them, it's all

about points; I find . . . It's all about rewards instead of having kids read just because they want to read" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). Morgan did not believe her sons were taught in a way that made them enjoy literature. I think she felt the rewards associated with reading confused the children who read to earn rewards instead of reading for the love of it.

Morgan discussed the accounting system again during our conversation. She told me Tiny Tim read regularly but was upset one day because "he read eleven chapters and that took him a long time to read" but could only write down one title (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). Even though Tiny Tim read as required, he was allowed to count only one book. He and Morgan did not find this to be fair. Morgan felt reading rewards distracted children from enjoying literature for what it was. I sensed tension between her beliefs about reading and her son's pursuit of rewards. She questioned the purpose of rewards. She showed me a hand-out she received at the beginning of the year describing what the children had to do for home reading; it explained that if a book was too difficult for the child to read, parents were encouraged to read it to their child (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). It also indicated not to record a book title when the parent read it, not the child (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). Morgan pointed out one of the objectives of the program was "to promote a love of reading" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). She thought parents who read to their children contributed to promoting a love for reading; she disagreed with not recording books read by the parents because they were too difficult for a child to read (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010).

**Supplying a variety of books.** Tiny Tim picked books from the school library to read to his parents; Morgan wondered about the books he brought home. She said:

Sometimes he brings these books home and I'm going, "Why did you pick this?" . . . I think he just picks just to pick. I don't think he puts any thought into it . . . That's why I like to take him to the public library every so often . . . He can take his time . . . He can look at them all, and he can pick out what he wants to read . . . I think [at school] it's rush, rush, rush, pick, pick, pick and then they get to go sit down and read a story. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010)

Picking books seemed to be an important part of reading for Morgan. She supported her son's home reading by taking him to the public library and offered him more time to make book choices than she assumed he had at school (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). She talked about some books Tiny Tim picked; they were not difficult but repetitive, and he enjoyed reading them (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). She showed me a book he picked but had not started yet; "It's a little bigger . . . It's too much . . . He gets discouraged 'cause it's too long", Morgan indicated (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010).

When Tiny Tim did not want to read, Morgan pulled from under her table a bin filled with books from her own collection; the books she selected were books she thought were at *Tiny Tim's level* (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010). She noted:

There's Scooby-Doo books . . . Spiderman books. There's books that may interest him . . . There's books that challenge him 'cause some are little chapter books, like there's a Cam Jansen one . . . but it's like the smaller version of it . . .

I'm trying to give him an option . . . [I ask him:] "Do you want to read this or [that?]. . . Look through". Or I'll go through, and I'll pick out about three or four ,and I'll say, "Which one of these do you want to read?" . . . I can judge on how tired he is . . . and how much interest he has, and we try to do it as soon as we get home from school. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, February 1, 2010)

Morgan used many strategies to support her son in learning to read. She offered him a wide variety of books and guided him in choosing appropriate ones to read depending on his energy level.

**Playing outside.** By the end of April, Morgan admitted her son's home reading had "totally fallen off . . . [They] hardly [did] home reading . . . anymore" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). She explained they had just been doing other things, the whole family, like watching movies (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). She also let her sons play outside after school (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010); it was springtime and the children enjoyed being outside. Morgan respected her son's desire to read, or not. "He doesn't want to [read] . . . I thought . . . if I force him to read, he's really going to hate it . . . so, I don't" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). Even though children were expected to read regularly in Grade 2, Morgan decided to give Tiny Tim a break since he did not want to read.

Morgan did not think Tiny Tim liked reading that much anymore (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). She noted this happened last year as well "because it got nice outside" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). Although Tiny Tim did not want to read much, his mother said he still asked her to read him some books, and sometimes, he tried to read them too (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010).

By the end of our conversation, Morgan recalled how Tiny Tim read two hundred and fifty nights in Grade 1, even though he did not have to (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). She explained the reward system in Grade 1 and seemed to find it encouraged Tiny Tim to read (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). She talked about her frustration with the reward system in Grade 2 again, and felt it contributed to her son's loss of interest in reading because when he read a chapter book, "He would not get credit for it" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). Morgan believed Tiny Tim responded more positively to the home-reading reward system in Grade 1 compared to the one in Grade 2<sup>100</sup>.

### **Communicating—Trying to Be Heard Again—Morgan**

When I met Morgan in March, it had been two months since our last conversation. She told me Tiny Tim got off the bus crying one day; Kiera, a girl from his class, was playing rock-paper-scissors with him and punched him in the stomach because she did not like Tiny Tim winning (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). Morgan went to talk to Kiera's mother who impressed her by the way she handled the situation; she made her daughter apologize to Tiny Tim (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). Morgan added Tiny Tim "had a couple of rough weeks"; there was an incident on the playground during which Tiny Tim was involved in an altercation with three other boys from his class. Tiny Tim had scratches on his chin. Morgan and Jay met Mr. Smith talk about the incident. She recalled Mr. Smith saying to her and Jay:

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<sup>100</sup> Mrs. Henry noted she accounted for chapters children read but if the chapters were short, she counted two chapters as one on the reading list (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, January 9, 2012).

I talk to them both . . . looked for certain signs to know who's been bullying . . . I don't think there's any blame going on . . . I think, to Tiny Tim, it seems like it's bullying. Maybe he doesn't like what they're doing. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010).

Morgan pointed out to him her "problem [was] the hands put on Tiny Tim . . . [He] came home with scratches . . . down his chin . . . and it was three against one" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). I asked Morgan if she talked to Mrs. Henry about it; she said, "She was supposed to come and she was on supervision . . . which really kind of annoyed me" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). When they planned the meeting, Morgan told me Mr. Smith said:

Can you wait and come during recess when Mrs. Henry could be here? . . . We got there and she goes . . . she's on supervision . . . [Mr. Smith] had agreed . . . She should be there . . . You know, she's the one that sees what's going on in the class, right? (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010).

Morgan and Jay took it on themselves to advise their son to stay away from those classmates; they asked their Grade 4 son to look out for his brother. Morgan added, "All the Grade 4s know who Tiny Tim is, so they all kind of keep an eye out . . . They've been really good and we haven't had anything since" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010).

Morgan was happy Mr. Smith addressed her concerns about her son's safety on the playground. She would have liked Mrs. Henry to meet with her and Jay when they spoke with Mr. Smith, but she was busy supervising children during recess. Morgan wondered why Mrs. Henry did not change her supervision duty with another teacher

(Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). She told me if nothing had been done about it, she:

probably would have [gone] over his head and would have said, “Okay, . . . this is enough. You know my child’s safety is . . . your responsibility . . . If he doesn’t feel safe at school, then, we have issues”. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010).

Tiny Tim’s safety at school preoccupied Morgan; she did not forget the incident that happened in Grade 1 in the washroom, nor the one involving the teenager who pushed Tiny Tim in the snow. Morgan felt her son lost confidence in Mr. Smith. “He didn’t want to go talk to him after this incident. . . . [She] said, ‘How come you didn’t go talk to [Mr. Smith]’, and he said, ‘Well, he didn’t do anything last time mom’” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). Morgan explained she did not talk much during the meeting with Mr. Smith because she was *so angry*. She let Jay talk; he wanted to “keep a relationship with the school administrator and not rock the boat for the kids” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). Morgan shared she looked at it “as three more months and we’re done” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). “I don’t think [Mr. Smith took] it as seriously as I think he should have”, she said to me (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). She would have liked him to talk to the children on *patrol* that day, those who stopped what was going on between the three boys and Tiny Tim rather than limit his involvement only with the four boys (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). She said he suggested Tiny Tim could walk with him at recess but she felt it would put a *bigger target* on his back (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). The incident was not resolved completely; I could tell Morgan was still



upset. Her experience with issues relating to Tiny Tim's safety was not all positive. She felt she and her son were not always taken seriously.

### **Attending to Tiny Tim the Reader—Later in the Year—Sonia**

In February, I watched Tiny Tim while the class had to read aloud the new list of words on the board; I could not hear him (Field notes, February 8, 2010). Later that morning, during the read along activity, I noticed he followed with his finger as it was expected, but he was not reading aloud; when his teacher walked by him, I could hear him read (Field notes, February 8, 2010). Tiny Tim was a serious student; I believe he started to read to follow his teacher's instructions. I wondered why Tiny Tim did not read before his teacher walked by, though. Did he find it difficult to follow the pace on the tape, the pace of a competent reader?

### **Attending to Tiny Tim the Reader—Later in the Year—Morgan**

During a conversation I had with Morgan at the end of March, she talked about the student-led conference she attended with Tiny Tim and Jay. "We were the only ones in the classroom . . . so we did get to talk [with the teacher]" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). Morgan felt that by the time Mrs. Henry talked to them, she led the conference, not Tiny Tim.

We got to the reading and she [said,] "You read this story" to him . . . She had two different stories that they could read. . . . I think one was easier . . . Instead of letting him pick which one he wanted to read, she picked it . . . I was handing him the other one to read because I knew the other one was too easy for him.

(Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010)

I asked Morgan which story she thought Tiny Tim wanted to pick and she said the more difficult one (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). Morgan said Mrs. Henry *means well*, but I believe she felt the teacher did not think her son could read the more difficult story (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010).

Morgan commented on her son's progress: "We're happy with him . . . in the progress he's made . . . with his reading . . . He's been picking a little bit tougher books, I think too" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010). I asked if she saw significant growth with his reading; she replied:

Oh yeah . . . He's picking up the expressions . . . He's doing the pauses and . . . it's so funny 'cause he'll read it and then he'll . . . see an exclamation point . . .

Well, he'll go back and he'll reread it with the expression . . . He catches that. He knows [it's] there and what it's there for. (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, March 24, 2010)

Morgan knew her son progressed with his reading. She had specific examples of what he learned to do and seemed happy to share those with me.

### **Sharing Academic Progress—Tiny Tim**

When I met Tiny Tim at the end of April, we talked about his progress in Grade 2.

Tiny Tim: I'm better at reading, and I'm better at my math.

Sonia: Are you?

Tiny Tim: Yeah.

Sonia: How can you tell?

Tiny Tim: Anything times one is the same number.

Sonia: Yes! . . . So you're better at math. I remember in Grade 1 you were really good.

Tiny Tim: Yes, and in Grade 2 I wasn't. You know why?

Sonia: No, I don't.

Tiny Tim: Because Grade 2 is higher grade than Grade 1. Grade 1 is easier, like in preschool. There was nothing. Then Kindergarten, there was something, which was very easy. In Grade 1, things were a little harder. And then

Sonia: But you were good in Grade 1.

Tiny Tim: Yes . . . 'cause it was kind of easy and kind of hard. And then Grade 2 starts the really hard thing.

Sonia: Okay, but now you're getting better?

Tiny Tim: Uh huh.

Sonia: What do you do better?

Tiny Tim: So the trees give you oxygen . . . The boat, if there's too much weight on it, the water can't hold it then it would sink. (Transcript, Sonia & Tiny Tim, April 24, 2010)

Tiny Tim talked about how he did better and gave me examples of what he knew in math and science. He seemed proud of that. He also explained how Grade 2 was harder than Grade 1 and his preschool years. I wondered how he imagined Grade 3, considering the way he described the increasing difficulty from grade to grade.

## **Reacting to the End of the Year Report—Morgan**

The last conversation I had with Morgan was at the end of June. They were busy packing and figuring out the logistics of their move (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, June 30, 2010). Morgan shared with me: “[Tiny Tim] did really well on his report card” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, June 30, 2010). She talked about his writing; she was frustrated because she felt she did not know enough about how he did and did not know he had to improve (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, June 30, 2010). She explained:

She doesn’t give me the spelling test results. [I] have no idea how [my] child was doing until they do . . . that big one (spelling test). How do I know that he needs to work on his spelling test if you’re not informing me of this? (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, June 30, 2010).

There was tension in Morgan’s comments that day.

Morgan also shared how Mrs. Henry gave year-end gifts to the children. “It’s the books that she’s had in her classroom for all these years . . . She gave him a really simple book. I’m like, hmmm” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, June 30, 2010). I asked Morgan if it might have been possible that the children picked their books but she did not know (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, June 30, 2010). Morgan seemed to be sensitive to comments regarding her son’s reading; it was the same at the student-led conference in March when Mrs. Henry suggested Tiny Tim read the easier book. Even though Morgan said her son did really well in Grade 2, I wondered if she believed Mrs. Henry felt the same way about Tiny Tim’s reading achievements.

## **Epilogue**

Tiny Tim and his family moved to Bradford in July 2010. He attended Grade 3 in his new school. He was still at the same school when I met him in Grade 4. His mother had just heard from his Grade 4 teacher that he scored low on reading tests; she told me he was at the Grade 1 level for word recognition (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 12, 2011). Morgan seemed troubled by those results.

In this narrative account, I wrote about Tiny Tim's lived experiences in Grade 2 in Mrs. Henry's class. In the following chapter, I share Matson's Grade 2 narrative account.

## Chapter Nine: Matson in Grade 2

In the following chapter, I describe Matson's experience in Grade 2 along with those of his mother and his teacher.

### **Doing Better in Grade 2—Matson, Marie, Mrs. Henry, Sonia**

**First impression.** The first day I was reunited with Matson, I watched him read silently after the morning bell (Field notes, September 14, 2009). He was focused on the book he picked from the basket assigned to his group and appeared to be reading it (Field notes, September 14, 2009). Following the reading period, the children had to copy the new words of the week in their spelling duo-tangs. Matson was the first one to finish the task and looked proud of it; his teacher checked his work and gave him a sticker (Field notes, September 14, 2009). While waiting for his classmates to finish copying their words, Matson rested his head on his desk for a while and later took out his drawing book (Field notes, September 14, 2009); he still enjoyed drawing. On my first day back in the classroom as a researcher, I sensed Matson was comfortable in his new class.

Marie's comments during a conversation we had in September 2009 were aligned with my perception of Matson's experience at the beginning Grade 2. She recalled talking with him; "How the work was going? He said, 'It's easier than Grade 1'. . . . How come? . . . 'I don't know'. Is the reading hard? . . . 'No, I can do it'" (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, September 9, 2009). Marie seemed happy to inform me Matson felt successful with the curriculum Mrs. Henry was making with her students. Marie added:

He was surprised that [he could] read . . . Maybe [he thought] that over the summer, [he'd] forget how to read. . . . He said, "It's easy". . . . He's happy . . . it wasn't going to be as hard. (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, September 9, 2009).

**Reminiscing Grade 1.** Marie was excited to report Matson said he could read. Grade 1 had been challenging in certain aspects; Matson had doubts about his capacity to pass his first grade (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009); that worry still preoccupied him two days before school started when he asked his mother if he was going to fail (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, September 9, 2009). Marie recalled:

First, he was a little bit shocked that he was going to Grade 2. . . . Even in the summer, [I would say,] "You didn't fail" (She laughs). He thought he was going to fail. The weirdest thing! I don't even know where he got the word "fail" cause we don't use that word. . . . I really find that weird. (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, September 9, 2009)

Marie still did not understand why her son thought he might fail Grade 1; although he had passed, he seemed nervous about his upcoming Grade 2 school year. Passing Grade 1 did not appear to calm the concerns that made him question his ability to move on to Grade 2.

**Happy and successful.** Less than two weeks after Matson shared his worries about failing Grade 2, Marie was relieved to hear him talk about his experience in his new class. She said, "Yeah, he's been happy this week . . . He's happy 'cause he can do better. He's not finding it hard so far" (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, September 9, 2009). I remember finding Marie somewhat surprised when she told me Matson felt more confident at school. She welcomed his recent shift in how he felt about his competency

to do the work required in Grade 2, but I felt she hesitated to rejoice too quickly in case it would only be temporary.

In September, while I was observing in class, the children played a letter game that involved making as many words as possible with seven specific letters; Matson was able to make many different words with the letters and was one of the best in the class (Field notes, September 23, 2009). On another day, I watched him fill out a worksheet related to the story Mrs. Henry read; Matson completed it promptly and well (Field notes, September 14, 2009). By the end of September, Mrs. Henry shared with me that she thought Matson worked well (Field notes, September 28, 2009). From what I heard and observed in class so far, Matson was doing fine academically in Grade 2.

Marie shared that she asked Mrs. Henry how Matson was doing; the teacher's comment was: "He gets his work done . . . He tries hard. He's doing fine, the school work" (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). Marie thought her son's printing was better; she found that he did not "struggle too much [and seemed] to be able to spell words" (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). She added Matson appeared to be happy with school this year (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009).

I also sensed Matson felt successful. For example, when the class was working on a math worksheet and I was helping a number of students who struggled with it, Matson proudly showed me he was almost done (Field notes, October 19, 2009). I asked Mrs. Henry how she thought Matson would do in Grade 2; she seemed content with his performance in class when she told me she believed he would do fine (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, October 28, 2009).



Throughout the rest of the time I spent in class with Mrs. Henry and her students, I witnessed more occurrences where Matson seemed to experience success in Grade 2. He told me the subject matter he liked the most was *gym* (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, November 9, 2009). While watching the children in the gymnasium one day, I noticed how fast Matson could run, and what a strong presence he had during the physical activities in which he was involved (Field notes, February 1, 2010). I believe Matson's perception of success in Grade 2 was strengthened by his performance in the gymnasium. On another occasion, I watched Matson complete his Mad Minute sheet before the allotted time was up and without using his number line (Field notes, November 16, 2010). Finishing early, and calculating without a number line were achievements that could make Matson feel competent in Grade 2.

Mrs. Henry rewarded her students with Smarties<sup>101</sup>; one day, Matson earned one while playing the Word Wall Game after guessing the secret word from the word wall list (Field notes, November 26, 2009). Mrs. Henry's rewards suited Matson well; his mother pointed out that her son "love[d] cand[ies]. . . . He'[d] do anything for a candy" (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, December 9, 2009). Earning candies in Mrs. Henry's class was a marker for success among her students.

In December, Ramsey Elementary School was busy organizing a celebration in honour of Mrs. Ramsey<sup>102</sup>, an elderly woman after whom the school was named; each class had to write a sentence about their school and illustrate it (Field notes, December 2, 2009). Mrs. Henry's class wrote about their principal; Matson's illustration of the

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<sup>101</sup> Mrs. Henry was aware that rewarding students with candies was not a practice supported by everyone in the field. However, she chose to use it because it seemed to work well for her and her students.

<sup>102</sup> Mrs. Ramsey is a pseudonym.

principal was chosen to appear in the collective book, which would later be offered to Mrs. Ramsey during her visit to the school (Field notes, December 2, 2009). Matson could draw really well. His teacher recognized his abilities when she chose his drawing for the book (Field notes, December 2, 2009). Matson was aware of his talents in arts; classmates praised him about his drawings (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, December 2, 2009). He was storied as an artist among his peers and his teachers, including Mrs. Taylor in Grade 1 (Field notes, May 12, 2009).

Matson and I talked about his November report card; he understood a report card to be “something you get when you’re doing good in school . . . That’s when your parents know when you’re doing good stuff and some bad [stuff too]” (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, December 2, 2009). He could not tell me much more about what was on his report card, but he remembered there was a green happy face sticker on it (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, December 2, 2009). Matson believed his teacher put the sticker on his report card because he “did good” (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, December 9, 2009). Having helped the teacher stuff report cards into envelopes, I knew Mrs. Henry had put a sticker on everyone’s report card (Field notes, November 25, 2009). I smiled at first, when Matson assumed he received a sticker because he *did good*. I did not tell him all his classmates had one as well. I believed his confidence as a student shaped his understanding of the rationale for deserving a sticker on his report card.

Unlike in Grade 1 (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan and Jay, June 18, 2009), Matson seemed to like to write in Grade 2; he described writing and learning to spell as *exciting* (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, December 9, 2009). There was a strong emphasis in Mrs. Henry’s class on spelling; every week, she introduced a new list of words for the children

to study (Field notes, September 2009—February 2010). Matson did well in his spelling tests and believed he was a good speller (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, January 13, 2010). One day in January, after correctly spelling all the words on his test, he received a prize for scoring 100% on five spelling tests (Field notes, January 15, 2010). Matson performed well at what Mrs. Henry valued academically. I believe such successes contributed to shaping his student identity, one of a student who did well in tests.

The school year kept unfolding and I continued to notice moments during which Matson appeared to do well in class. In January, the children had to fill out a worksheet; Matson finished his work promptly (Field notes, January 27, 2010). It was easy for him to answer the questions on the page. He was proud to announce to the class that he was “done” (Field notes, January 27, 2010). During the same month, I visited Mrs. Henry at her house, who commented on how well Matson was doing in Grade 2: he “[has] very good work habits. He gets right down to business, and usually does it, and does a good job” (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, January 10, 2010). Matson, his mother, his teacher, as well as I, all commented on his academic achievements. Grade 2 seemed to be a better year for Matson.

**Becoming a better reader.** One day in October, I sat next to Matson and listened to him read during the early morning reading period; he could sound out most words, even though the book he picked was more difficult than those I had seen him choose in the past (Field notes, October 14, 2009). During an October conversation with Marie, she repeated that Matson found school easier in Grade 2 (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). She added that this year, her son seemed more interested in reading

(Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). Marie explained how Monica, her Grade 1 daughter, read to her after school, and how Matson wanted to read his sister's books:

Monica brings her books home. Now, he grabs them and wants to read them. . . .

Like, it's so funny. . . . I'll sit down with her to do her book. He's like, "I [want to] read it". . . . I make her read it first and then he reads it, and he sees how fast

he can read it now, so he's quite excited. (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009)

Monica, unlike Matson in Grade 1, liked to read to her mother as soon as she came home after school (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). Interestingly, now that he was in Grade 2, Matson joined them and took pleasure in reading the books his young sister brought home from Grade 1. Marie was amused to see her son interested in showing he could easily read his sister's books. She told me she thought he "want[ed] to impress her . . . He [was] like, 'I can read faster than you, Monica' . . . ." (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). Marie was happy to see Matson more interested in reading. "This year, he'll even try and read. Last year, he wouldn't even really try"; she believed Matson felt like this because he could read better (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009).

I wanted to know how Matson felt about his reading skills in the second half of his school year. I asked if he thought he could read pretty well; he responded "yeah" (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, January 18, 2010). Matson recalled "it was kind of harder [in Grade 1]" but could not tell me why reading was harder at that moment and why it was easier in Grade 2, or what happened since then (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, January 18, 2010).

During a conversation with Marie in February, I asked if Matson was still doing well at school; she noted that he did not find the work hard (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 18, 2010). Marie mentioned she believed her daughter Monica drove Matson to read more because she “was always grabbing a book . . . [wanting] everybody to hear her [read] . . . [reading] as loud as she [could] . . . and [asking], ‘What does this spell: w,h,i,l,e’, and [wanting] someone to tell her” (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010). Marie found Matson supportive of his sister because he sat with her and helped her; “She [read] out loud and he just kind of [sat] there . . . Sometimes, he [was] watching TV and [helped] her if she [didn’t] get a word” (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010). She thought her son’s reading improved considerably in Grade 2 and did not notice any struggle (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010). Marie did not worry about Matson’s schoolwork because she had not received alarming calls from his teacher; she added that he was “the *most stable* in school, so far, [among her children]” (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010). I believe Marie was comparing Matson’s school stories with his two older brothers’ experiences which had been more complex than what she had experienced so far with her youngest son.

When I returned to Matson’s house to meet his mother shortly after the March report card, I inquired into how Matson was doing since I did not visit his class anymore. Marie thought he was doing *good* and did not hear complaints from him (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010). She recalled a conversation during which she asked him if he liked to read; he told her he did and said, “I’m a really good reader” (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010). Marie seemed happy to hear Matson say he was a *really good reader* and commented on how “Somehow . . . he figure[d] he [was] a good

reader now” (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010). While reporting on Matson, she spoke about Monica who continued to be increasingly interested in reading; I sensed that she partly credited her daughter’s enthusiasm towards reading for Matson’s new perspective on reading and his story of himself (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010). Marie showed me her son’s report card and pointed out “The only problem he [had was] with the punctuation and capitalization . . . [that he did] good progress in reading” (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010). Everything else on his report card was positive; Marie did not have worries about Matson’s schoolwork (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010).

Later during our conversation, Marie shared that she thought Monica had passed Matson in reading; her daughter had started to bring junior chapter books home (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010). She did not think Matson struggled with reading anymore and added that he only stopped on the *odd* word (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010). Marie thought her son could read *pretty quickly and fluently* but believed that if he and Monica read the same book, Monica would read it *smoother and quicker* than Matson would (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010). I asked Marie if she thought Matson was aware that his sister was *passing* him as a reader, but she did not think he *cared* (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010). She explained how she believed her son understood *good reading* as follows: “He thinks the faster you [read], the better you are. . . . He’s very competitive. . . . He can read faster than Monica, so [he thinks] he’s a better reader” (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010). Matson’s reading experience at home alongside his younger sister seemed to shape a positive image for him, and of him, as a reader.

**Matson's restorying.** Marie spoke about the long story Matson wrote about the numerous activities he did at home with Stanley<sup>103</sup>; she added that she thought he “kind of like[d] writing [this year]” (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010). She shared how Matson liked to use pastels to draw pictures at home, and how he enjoyed writing about his pictures (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010). Writing appeared to be an activity in which Matson engaged more frequently and willingly in Grade 2.

Marie observed that her son had not mentioned he might fail Grade 2 since September 2009 (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010). She recounted what happened the day he brought his March report card home:

This [was] so funny. He [said], “I'm getting the best at everything. I got check marks on every single thing”. So he just looked on here and saw he got a check mark, and thought he was just doing 100%. . . . I didn't tell him any different. I'm like, “Yeah, you're doing great”. . . . That was how he judged it. I got a check mark every line so I'm getting 100%. . . . Yeah, that's how he considered he was doing. . . . His esteem [was] pretty high . . . Yeah, for some reason this year he figure[d] he [was] pretty smart. (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010)

Marie thought Matson's comment about his report card indicated he felt good about how he performed in Grade 2. She liked that he had more confidence at school. She did not feel the need to clarify the true meaning<sup>104</sup> of the check marks on his report card. She also had a sense that her son was doing well from the results he had on his spelling tests; “He gets maybe two wrong out of . . . twenty-six words or whatever it is. So, it looks like

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<sup>103</sup> Stanley was the stuffed dog I gave the children on my last day in their class.

<sup>104</sup> A check mark on the report card meant that the checked objective was met; it did not relate to a specific percentage.

he's doing okay" (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010). Marie and her husband started the year practising words with Matson but felt he did not need the same kind of work anymore; instead, they encouraged him to read the words over as a way to study them (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010). Marie felt Matson improved a lot during the year; she recalled how, in Grade 1, they worked much harder with him because Mrs. Taylor told them their *son was behind* (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009). However, in Grade 2, they did not see "the same struggle" (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010) with Matson. Marie was pleased with his achievements in school and appeared confident in his abilities.

A few weeks after I stopped going to the school, I visited Matson at his house; he told me school was going *good* when I asked him about it (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, April 24, 2010). After a short time in his house, we went to the creek where he liked to spend time and continued our conversation (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, April 24, 2010). While we walked, I reminded Matson about his concerns in Grade 1 about failing and asked him if he thought he might fail Grade 2; he answered *no* without any hesitation (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, April 24, 2010). I pursued by recalling how he did not like to write in Grade 1; "I didn't and now I do", he replied (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, April 24, 2010). I was curious about why he liked it better but he could not tell me what happened; I asked if it was easier and he said, "Yeah" (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, April 24, 2010). My visit with Matson gave me the opportunity to hear his stories on how well he was doing in school.

In mid-July, I returned to Matson's house to meet his mother. We talked about Matson's Grade 2 school year. Marie confidently spoke of how well Matson did and



mentioned she believed there were no *real major* concerns regarding her son; she did not worry about anything (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, July 13, 2010). Matson's Grade 2 school year ended on a very positive note. It had been a shifting year for a boy who finished Grade 1 worried he might fail.

### **Matson's Behaviour—Mrs. Henry, Marie, Matson, Sonia**

Academically, Grade 2 was a good year for Matson. As mentioned previously, Mrs. Henry was happy with Matson's work; "He gets his work done . . . He tries hard. He's doing fine, the schoolwork" (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, October 28, 2009). Her comment, however, was specific to his schoolwork. When I helped Mrs. Henry after school on the first day back in September, she mentioned to me that Matson *pushed* all day (Field notes, September 2, 2009). I was uncertain about the exact meaning of her comment but remembered Mrs. Taylor's remark about Matson in Grade 1; she used the term *red flag* in relation to his behaviour in her class (Field notes, June 3, 2009). Both his teachers expressed concerns about his behaviour to me.

**Bumpings<sup>105</sup> in the classroom.** Even though Matson was doing well academically in Grade 2, his behaviour seemed to be problematic at times. One day, during silent reading, I noticed Matson did not seem interested in the book he picked; I also saw him distract his neighbours and stand up to go find a tissue at the front of the classroom (Field notes, September 21, 2009). From experience, I knew children found reasons to walk around the classroom when they were bored, did not feel like working, or did not know what to do. I thought Matson was avoiding reading. Mrs. Henry was busy

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<sup>105</sup> Clandinin et al. (2006) first coined the term *bumping* as a way to think about relational tensions in people's lives.

attending to another student, and I believe she did not notice Matson's unfocused attention (Field notes, September 21, 2009). She did not comment on Matson's actions during the reading period, but I heard her tell him to stop making noise with his mouth (Field notes, September 21, 2009). That same morning, Mrs. Henry asked Matson to bring his scissors to her desk because he was playing with them (Field notes, September 21, 2009).

Two days later, as well as later in October, Mrs. Henry told Matson to be quiet again; he made sounds with his mouth which bothered Mrs. Henry, who demanded he stopped (Field notes, September 23, 2009; field notes, October 14, 2009). That same day, after he finished his work, Matson joined his classmate Anwar at the computer, at the back of the room (Field notes, September 23, 2009). Matson and Anwar seemed to enjoy each other's company while they played at the computer; they later became noisy and Mrs. Henry told them to be quieter (Field notes, September 23, 2009). The boys lowered their voices but soon returned to laughing and being loud; at that point, Mrs. Henry told them to leave the computer because of the noise they made (Field notes, September 23, 2009). Mrs. Henry did not tolerate unnecessary noises or loudness in her classroom; she seemed to appreciate a quiet environment for herself and for her students.

On another day, I found Matson's desk moved to the front row (Field notes, September 25, 2009). I believe it is common practice for teachers to place children who can be disruptive or distractible, in the front row, so they can easily keep an eye on them and limit distractions. I sensed Mrs. Henry wanted Matson to be more focused and less disruptive during class and assumed she moved his desk for that reason.

After recess one morning, Matson sat at his desk wearing his jacket; his teacher asked him to take it off (Field notes, October 5, 2009). Matson replied he did not want to; Mrs. Henry firmly said to him that she did not ask him if he wanted to take it off, but *told* him to take it off (Field notes, October 5, 2009). Matson promptly removed his jacket, hung it in the coatroom, and sat at his desk (Field notes, October 5, 2009). Mrs. Henry did not seem to appreciate when students resisted her instructions. This was foregrounded again in December when Mrs. Henry commented on how well Matson drew (Field notes, December 3, 2009). However, she added that he did not like to colour and reported Matson saying *I don't want to colour* when she told him to colour his picture (Field notes, December 3, 2009). She carried on by saying that he needed to learn he should not say *I don't want to do that* to a teacher (Field notes, December 3, 2009). Mrs. Henry wanted her students to be obedient with her; Matson had to learn to respect his teacher's authority, whether or not he liked what she asked him to do.

In January, while Mrs. Henry was explaining a math concept, Matson said something that made Anwar laugh; Mrs. Henry looked at the two boys and, raising her voice, said, "Excuse me!" (Field notes, January 6, 2010). Watching from the back of the room, I believed she disapproved of Matson's behaviour. During a math activity, earlier in the year, Mrs. Henry distributed interlocking cubes to the children; they had to use them to represent numbers (Field notes, November 16, 2009). After a few minutes, she took away Matson's cubes because he was not doing what she wanted him to do (Field notes, November 16, 2009). Matson was interested in building with the cubes and seemed distracted by that. He was not following his teacher's directions and by taking the cubes away, Mrs. Henry reminded Matson that it was not an appropriate behaviour in

her class. The bumpings I noticed while Mrs. Henry and Matson co-composed curriculum, I believe, shaped how they both storied each other.

**Silliness.** When I first took Matson for a conversation at the beginning of October, we talked about him being *funny* (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, October 7, 2009).

Sonia: You like to make your friends laugh.

Matson: Uh huh. Anwar laughs even though I don't even try to be funny. . .  
. When I'm not being funny, Anwar thinks it's funny.

Sonia: Anwar does? He thinks you're a funny guy.

Matson: When I don't even do it. (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, October 7, 2009)

Matson noticed Anwar paid attention to what he did; he seemed entertained by Matson's actions. During the same conversation, Matson mimicked what I said, gave silly answers to some of my questions, and talked about goofy topics (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, October 7, 2009). I believe Matson was comfortable with me because he was playful during our conversation. It was important for me, as a narrative inquirer, that Matson was comfortable around me. Another time, while he and I were walking to our meeting room, he mumbled something I could not understand; when I asked him to repeat what he said, he replied, "I'm kidding . . . I'm bad" (Field notes, November 2, 2009). Matson retained a humorous and mischievous attitude through most of our conversations. For example, when I asked him which pseudonym he would like for his mother, he answered, "Mrs. Cheeky (he laughs) . . . just kidding" (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, December 9, 2009). The same day, he told a number of personal stories.

Matson: I've accidentally driven my mom's car before (he laughs), just backward down the driveway . . . Mom started to run and then opened the door and stopped it . . . I was 5. Mom called the cops once.

Sonia: Why?

Matson: I don't know. . . I got stitched on my foot . . . It [was] purple. . . . When I was a baby, I had a blue head. It [was] just so freaky.

Sonia: You . . . stopped breathing?

Matson: Yeah.

Sonia: Good thing your mom is a nurse. She could help you. . .

Matson: She wasn't a nurse that time. . . .

Sonia: I think you like to play tricks on people.

Matson: Yeah. We got to go. (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, December 9, 2009)

Matson enjoyed pulling my leg and fooling around during our conversations. I knew his mother became a nurse before she had children (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, September 9, 2009). In addition, I think he also liked to tell stories that would make me react, such as the one he told me about his mother calling the police.

The same day he told the stories mentioned above, I asked him where he read in his house.

Matson: [I] read on the couch and on my bed, and in the garage.

Sonia: In the garage?

Matson: (He laughs.)

Sonia: Okay, so you read on the couch,  
 Matson: And in the garage . . . I do it in my dad's car.  
 Sonia: Really?  
 Matson: Yeah.  
 Sonia: In the garage?  
 Matson: Yeah.  
 Sonia: Why do you go there?  
 Matson: Hmmm, it's private. . . . Everybody is so noisy. (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, December 9, 2009)

In February, during a visit with Marie, I talked about Matson's reading habits at home; I asked about him reading in the garage. She told me he did not read in the garage: Not in the garage. . . . Unless he's . . . Maybe he [snuck] out there. I don't know. . . . No, he could be a storyteller. . . . Oh, yeah, I've caught him a few times . . . making up things. . . . If he can get you to believe it, he thinks it's really funny. . . . Oh, yeah, he's told me a few stories and I'm like, "what?" . . . Then he gets this look. "Like, Matson, like, you can't . . . make things up" . . . I have to tell him sometimes, "You know what, [it's] . . . funny or whatever but sometimes . . . you're going to be looked at as a liar, like. You have to be careful". (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010)

Hearing Marie describe how Matson enjoyed pulling people's legs made me think that was what he did the day he told me he read in the garage. He laughed after he saw my reaction, and that matched Marie's remark about her son's amusement with making people believe what he says.

At the student-led conferences in December, Marie was surprised to hear Mrs. Henry's comments about her son:

I know the one he gets in trouble for. He seems to be distractible in class or whatever, like, the fooling around a little bit. . . . The little turkey, is he bad when you're in there? . . . She seems to think that he's the mischievous one I guess. . . . It's probably hard on him to sit there . . . He said, "It's a little bit too quiet". . . . I think he'd like a little more interaction. . . . It [was] different in Mrs. Taylor's classroom . . . [but] he's not complaining. He's not saying I hate school or anything, so. (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, December 9, 2009)

Marie checked with me again, later in March, if Matson was mischievous in class; I told her, "He [was] a little bit, when the teacher [turned] her back. . . . Otherwise, he [liked] to be . . . the *good* student. That's what I . . . noticed" (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010). Marie seemed amused by my answer (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010). Even though she was surprised to learn her son was silly at school, I felt she enjoyed hearing about his sense of humour and his playfulness.

**Mischievous and disruptive.** Spending time alongside Matson as a researcher, I came to story him as a mischievous boy. On the other hand, I believe Mrs. Henry, who was an authority figure, storied Matson differently. Marie recalled how Mrs. Henry commented on Matson's behaviour at Meet the Teacher Night:

We went to the [Meet the Teacher Night]. She goes, “He’s the number one troublemaker<sup>106</sup>”. I’m like, “Really? Oh” . . . I said, “Well, what is it he” . . . She goes, like, “He’s just mischievous, like, nothing bad” . . . Just more mischievous, just whatever. I don’t know what he’s doing . . . like giggling or whatever . . .

(Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009)

I think Marie was slightly concerned about what she heard from Matson’s teacher, but I do not believe she thought it was too serious. Marie mentioned Mrs. Henry told her she would just *turn this off* and added Matson did his work and paid attention, but she noted he liked being the centre of attention (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009).

Marie told me she thought he was just trying to be silly; I added he liked to be funny (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). Marie was surprised to hear that about her son, but then recollected Mrs. Taylor in Grade 1 saying something about it as well:

[He] was a little bit of a stinker, and I was shocked ‘cause he’s normally like, I thought he’d be just more like, subdued. I was surprised but I mean I shouldn’t be; his dad was just a total stink bomb in school. (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009).

Marie then described her husband’s experiences in school:

He got kicked out in Kindergarten. He was just wild. . . . They couldn’t handle him, you know. He had ADHD really severely and [nobody] ever looked into it. . . . He was always just labelled the bad kid, the brat . . . He just said he gave up on school because he just couldn’t get anywhere so he just fooled around. . . . He

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<sup>106</sup> The word *troublemaker* was used by Marie in this quote. However, Mrs. Henry wanted to indicate that she would have never used that term in regard to one of her students (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, October 12, 2011).



couldn't do anything . . . probably [because of] the ADHD. He said he finally just gave up, he was like whatever . . . Why bother . . . and then he just fooled around and made people laugh, and that's all he did. . . . He [graduated]. He did get through; I don't know how . . . but he didn't have high marks . . . He went to SCIT<sup>107</sup> . . . probably six years out of school and got like 2<sup>nd</sup> in class. . . . It's so bizarre, like it turned out he actually could . . . He did find it hard . . . but he did fine. . . . He did . . . his carpentry ticket. . . . He came out good . . . He's really good with working with his hands. (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009)

Marie spoke passionately about her husband's schooling. I wondered if she worried about Matson. I asked her if she had other concerns about her son; she replied, "I asked [Mrs. Henry] how [Matson] was doing and she said, 'He gets all his work done and he tries hard', . . . She said, 'He's doing fine, the school work'. He's just a turkey<sup>108</sup>," (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). I did not sense Marie worried about Matson in school. I believe his academic accomplishments reassured her.

At the end of October, Mrs. Henry and I had a conversation in a restaurant; she asked me if Matson thought she was "too strict" (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, October 28, 2009). I responded that he did not say she was too strict, to which she added, "'Cause I know I'm a lot stricter than some other [teachers]" (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, October 28, 2009). All I had heard by then (October 28, 2009) was Marie reporting that Matson said Mrs. Henry made them "be really quiet" (Transcript, Sonia &

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<sup>107</sup> SCIT is a post-secondary institution that offers various programs from baccalaureates to apprenticeships.

<sup>108</sup> Here again, the word *turkey* was used by Marie but Mrs. Henry noted she would not have used that word either (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, October 12, 2011).

Marie, September 9, 2009). However, much later in July 2010, Marie shared that “Every once in a while [Matson] would say, ‘Mrs. Henry’s mean’. . . . We’d hear that out of his mouth a few times. And I’d go ‘What did she do?’ He couldn’t really say what she did” (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, July 13, 2010). Marie wanted to know what made her son say his teacher was mean but Matson did not, or could not, explain why he said that. Mrs. Henry storied herself as *stricter* than other teachers and wondered if Matson had mentioned something to me about that; he never did and did not mention to me she was mean. I only heard his mother speak about it.

During the time I spent in the classroom, I read books to the class; the students gathered around me to listen. Mrs. Henry left the room for a few minutes and usually came back before I was done reading. On two occasions, Matson and Anwar talked while I was reading and distracted the other children and me (Field notes, October 7, 2009; February 1, 2010). During those moments, I was unsure of what I should do, considering I had negotiated my participant observer role as one who did not discipline children. Reading the book while Matson and Anwar were talking distracted me and, I believe, the children who wanted to hear what I was reading. Even though I did not want to discipline them, I felt I needed to stop their behaviour in order for the reading activity to continue. Being in a position in which I was leading a group activity gave me a different perspective on some of Matson’s behaviours; it helped me understand when Mrs. Henry did not appreciate his playfulness, as it could be disruptive.

The following summer (2010), I met Marie at her house. Again, we talked about Matson’s amusement in making his friends laugh.

Marie:            I didn’t realize that until grade 2.

Sonia: Oh, really?

Marie: I think in Grade 1 he was probably a little more, I don't know, it was a different classroom.

Sonia: Uh huh. Mrs. Taylor never said anything about . . .

Marie: She said he was mischievous, but she didn't really, like Mrs. Henry said it more than once. (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, July 13, 2010)

I believe Marie became aware that Matson's behaviour was more of an issue in Grade 2 than it was in Grade 1; she thought Mrs. Henry talked about it more often than Mrs. Taylor did. I think the silliness Marie saw in her son's behaviour was perceived as disruptive on the school landscape.

**Relationships with other children.** Later in November, the children sat in a circle to play a math game; Mrs. Henry asked Kiera, another student, to trade places with Matson because he and Anwar were playing and laughing (Field notes, November 16, 2009). I think Mrs. Henry tried to keep Matson quiet by distancing him from distractions. Kiera was the child who had to move; I wondered if it bothered her. Children often like to sit next to their friends in school; because of Matson, Kiera might have been moved away from a friend. I wondered if that frustrated her? Weeks later in January, Mrs. Henry left the classroom for a few minutes and while she was gone Matson made noises; Julia, his classmate, told him several times to "be quiet" (Field notes, January 4, 2010). Julia's comments and body language expressed her disapproval of Matson's mischievous attitude while their teacher was absent. Back from recess one morning in February, Jeeval shared his frustrations with Matson; he came in and complained Matson called him a name he did not like (Field notes, February 1, 2010).

These situations brought me to reflect on Matson's relationships with his classmates and on the possibility that they story him negatively.

Early in the school year, I asked Matson who was his best friend in the class; he replied, "I don't have a best friend in class" (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, October 7, 2009). I wondered if he had a best friend in the school and he said, "Brent" (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, October 7, 2009). Brent was with Matson in Mrs. Taylor's Grade 1; Marie reported that Matson was upset because Brent was not in his Grade 2 class (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, September 9, 2009). I asked Marie if Matson had friends in Grade 2 but she could not tell or remember specific names (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, September 9, 2009). Later in March after Matson's birthday, Marie told me about her son's birthday party:

I was a little frustrated with him for his birthday because . . . he decided he didn't want a birthday [party]. I'm like why? . . . No birthday? . . . He didn't want anything. . . . I did have one 'cause I said, "Well, Matson, . . . Then you're going to want one in a week, after you decide" . . . So, I went to the school and I could barely get him to pick kids. He only picked three kids to come. . . . He picked Brandon, [from Grade 1] who's [at] the other . . . school [for Grade 2]. . . . And then he picked hmmm, Brent, who's his best buddy. . . . And then Brent suggested that he invite a kid named Travis, I think his name was. . . . I don't even know if he was in his class. . . . I've never heard him say a word about Travis but then, he just invited him to his birthday. . . . I thought that he always was kind of friends with Anwar. [He did not invite him] . . . I think they were on the outs that week . . . He was mad at him. (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010).

Matson did not appear to have many close friends at Ramsey Elementary School beside Brent. His response to his mother asking him about a birthday party was puzzling to me; from my experience, I assumed children were often excited about celebrating their birthdays with their friends. Did Matson feel he had friends at school? Marie shared with me in February how Matson wanted to change schools and go to the school where his friend Brandon from Grade 1 had moved (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010). Only later in the year did Matson identify boys he considered his friends. When I met Matson in April, he told me his friends were Anwar and Travis (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, April 24, 2010). A few weeks later, I spoke with Mrs. Henry who confirmed Matson was changing schools and wondered why (Field notes, May 15, 2010). Marie explained during a summer conversation how they came to their decision:

But he wants to go where his brother is. I think it'll be good for Bradley to have him there. I'm not going to worry too much about this stuff. . . . [Mrs. Taylor] said their numbers were low for next year. . . . She said, "We need to keep our numbers". . . . What are you going to do, though? . . . It's a really good [school] . . . St. Mark's<sup>109</sup> School. . . . I can see a difference in there . . . quite a big difference . . . . I don't know what it is, but the kids all just seem happier there. . . . I don't know. Austin was so much happier there than any school he's been to. They love the teachers; they love the atmosphere. The school spirit, team spirit, a lot of that kind of stuff. Like there's lots of positive encouragement of the kids. I don't know . . . It's hard to tell. Just the attitudes there . . . And maybe it's the whole,

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<sup>109</sup> St. Mark's is a pseudonym.

the values in them too, ‘cause it’s Catholic, so they have to do the religion part.

(Transcript, Sonia & Marie, July 13, 2010)

Marie’s reasons for moving Matson to St. Mark’s School seemed more complex than reuniting him with his friend Brandon, a reason earlier mentioned. Although Marie was considering moving Matson to another school, her youngest child, Monica, did not want to go to St. Mark’s; she wanted to stay at Ramsey School (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, July 13, 2010). My sense was, aside from finding St. Mark’s to be a *good* school, Marie respected her children’s wishes concerning which school they wanted to attend, thus the reason for Matson and Monica to be in two different schools.

Unfortunately, Matson’s experience at St. Mark’s turned out to be difficult. I received a worried email message from Marie in November 2010, in which she shared how Matson *was not doing well* at his new school:

The teacher [said], “He [was acting] out a lot (verbally, etc.), and [was] distracting other kids” . . . She also [said], “He [was] getting no work done” . . . Almost every time [I went] to school, he [was] in the hallway working. [The teacher felt] he [had] ADD . . . [I was] never told [that] before . . . The teacher [was] young and new . . . [I] was not sure if she [set] boundaries enough for him. (Marie, personal communication, November 7, 2010)

Marie thought “[Matson was] pushing as far as he [could]” (Marie, personal communication, November 8, 2010). Later in December, I phoned Mrs. Henry, who discussed Matson’s problems at his new school (she had run into Marie in November); Mrs. Henry said, “She saw a bit of trouble with him [the previous] year but laid the rules clearly and did not have problems with him. She was really surprised he was not doing

his work . . .” (Field notes, December 18, 2010). The school stories I heard about Matson at his new school were different from the school stories I heard of him at Ramsey Elementary. I did not talk to Matson about his new school but the stories he told of him in Grade 2 did not match what I was hearing about him at the new school. I wonder how he storied himself at the new school. Did his school stories of himself match the school stories people told of him? I learned in March 2011 that Matson returned to Ramsey Elementary School after the Christmas break; Marie mentioned his stomachaches went away, and she thought he was happier (Marie, personal communication, March 8, 2011). She reported that his new Grade 3 teacher said he was not *bad*, like the other teacher kept saying (Marie, personal communication, March 8, 2011). Matson’s new Grade 3 teacher at Ramsey School told Marie he was behind in math which was not a surprise to her considering he spent so much time in the hallway (Marie, personal communication, March 8, 2011). Marie added that Matson was happy to be back with his friend Brent who was coming to their house for a sleepover for Matson’s birthday (Marie, personal communication, March 8, 2011).

**Following the rules.** Students in Mrs. Henry’s class sometimes used *offices* when writing tests to avoid being tempted to copy from each other (Field notes, September 16, 2009). At other times, their teacher encouraged them to wrap their arm around their work to hide it from their peers (Field notes, September 25, 2009). When the class played the Word Wall Game, I heard Matson tell Kate, “You can’t copy me” (Field notes, October 14, 2009). He explained to me during a conversation they were not allowed to help each other when doing math (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, November 4, 2009). He added, “We’re not allowed helping, just like Kate tries to copy me . . . The

teacher says you're not allowed . . . [It is] so you can learn" (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, November 4, 2009). I asked Matson what he and his classmates could do when they did not know the answer; he responded, "Ask the teacher" (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, November 4, 2009). From the various situations I saw in the classroom and from conversing with Matson, I gathered that copying another student's answers was forbidden in Mrs. Henry's class. Matson knew that rule well; he did not allow Kate to copy him and reminded other students not to copy their peers either (Field notes, January 27, 2010), as it was against the rules.

When Matson came to talk with me one morning, we drew pictures together; he shared with me that on the second day of school in Grade 2, he misspelled the word *ask* (he wrote *ass*) which he reported made his teacher mad (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, November 9, 2009). He remembered how she asked him to go to the boot room where he found out she thought he wrote the *bad word* on purpose (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, November 9, 2009). I asked him if he wanted to make a joke by writing the bad word but he replied he forgot the *k* (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, November 9, 2009). I asked if he told his teacher he did not write the bad word on purpose and he said he did; he added she let him go back to his desk and helped him erase the extra *s* (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, November 9, 2009). During our conversation, Matson wrote the *bad word* on a piece of paper to show me what happened that day but worried about leaving it on the page. "Better erase it. I don't want to tick the teacher", he told me (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, November 9, 2009). I sensed Matson was uncomfortable when he told me the bad word story. He knew his teacher did not allow him to write such words and he did not want her finding out he wrote it again. He did not want to make her mad. Even



though Matson could be silly at times, he also wanted to be a good student who followed the rules. This was apparent the day he and I walked around the school while he took pictures; I asked him if he wanted to go in the staffroom and he said, “No . . . we’ll get in trouble” (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, January 18, 2010). Matson made it very clear to me that he did not want to go in the staffroom because he was not allowed in there; he did not want to be in trouble.

There were more rules in Matson’s Grade 2 class I noticed. When students wrote in their scribblers or in their journals, Mrs. Henry frequently emphasized to write the date first (Field notes, September 2009—February 2010). Matson followed that rule consistently when he wrote and also when drew pictures during our conversations (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, November 9, 2009; November 18, 2009). He was aware of the expectations regarding the schoolwork and generally did his best to meet them even though sometimes he pushed the limits with his behaviour.

### **About Reading and Writing—Matson, Mrs. Henry**

At the beginning of each day, the children read silently; Matson often seemed interested and engaged in the books he chose from the assigned basket (Field notes, September 2009—February 2010). Later, most mornings, the whole class read stories from their readers; following that, Mrs. Henry asked questions about what had just been read (Field notes, September 2009—February 2010). Matson very rarely put up his hand to offer answers to his teacher’s questions (Field notes, September 2009—February 2010). Unlike a handful of students who frequently volunteered answers, Matson’s individual contribution to whole class group activities was minimal. However, reading

aloud to the class was something he told me he enjoyed doing, when I asked him about it (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, January 18, 2010). I heard him read a few times during my fieldwork. Generally, his reading was fine, although a bit slow and hesitant (Field notes, October 16, 2009; November 2, 2009). Mrs. Henry noted Matson was in her *low* group of readers but was thinking about moving him to a different group because he seemed to be pretty *good*; she wanted to wait a little bit, however, to give him time to feel good about himself first (Field notes, September 23, 2009).

Matson liked to listen to his teacher read books (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, January 18, 2010) and was attentive and interested when she did (Field notes, September 2009—February 2010). He recalled how in Grade 1, he read with a partner and enjoyed doing that but noted it was not something he thought they did in Grade 2<sup>110</sup> (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, January 18, 2010). I did not see the children read with a partner when I was in Mrs. Henry's classroom; students read in a large group or read individually. I asked Matson if he thought some children needed help with reading; he named Travis and Kate (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, January 18, 2010). I asked if he helped them sometimes with their reading but he answered, "We can't, we have to read our own books" (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, January 18, 2010). My sense is Matson thought it was the teacher's job to help children with reading while his was to do his work.

Some days during my conversations with Matson, I wrote something on a piece of paper to initiate the conversation on a specific topic. Matson took pleasure in responding in writing. Often, he inquired about the spelling of the words he wanted to write

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<sup>110</sup> Mrs. Henry mentioned to me upon reading this comment from Matson that her students did paired reading using their readers (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, October 12, 2011).

(Transcript, Sonia & Matson, December 2, 2009; January 13, 2010; January 25, 2010); he was cognisant of the existence of a *correct* way to spell words and he wanted to write according to those rules.

One day early in December, I asked Matson what he liked best at school, a question I had asked him in the past. He quickly answered, “recess and gym”, just as he had previously (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, December 2, 2009). I wanted to know how he felt about the various subjects and activities in the classroom. I invited him to draw a *happy face* or a *sad face* beside words I wrote, such as *math*, *reading*, *spelling*, *science* and asked him to write a word that would describe how he felt about these subject matters (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, December 2, 2009). Beside the word *reading*, Matson drew a sad face and wrote, “not fun” (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, December 2, 2009). I asked him why he wrote *not fun*; he said, “I don’t like reading” (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, December 2, 2009). I acknowledged his response; “You don’t like reading in school, [but] do you like reading at home?”; he answered *no* and could not tell me why he did not like to read (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, December 2, 2009). Later in January 2010, I reminded him of his comment about reading; he said, “I just don’t like reading ‘cause it’s not fun” (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, January 13, 2010). I inquired into this with him.

Sonia: It’s not fun?

Matson: Uh huh.

Sonia: Is it the same at home?

Matson: No.

Sonia: How is it at home?

Matson: I just have to read a couple of pages.

Sonia: And at school, do you have to read more?

Matson: Uh huh.

Sonia: And it isn't fun?

Matson: Yeah. (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, January 13, 2010)

Even though Matson found reading easier in Grade 2 (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, January 18, 2010), he did not appear to enjoy it more. It was not *fun* for him, and I understood he felt he had to read too much at school, unlike at home. We pursued our conversation.

Sonia: Is there a book you really like?

Matson: Hmmm, yes.

Sonia: Which one?

Matson: Hmmm, the skidooing one. . . .

Sonia: [It] explains stuff about skidoos or it's a story about skidoos?

Matson: It explains. . . .

Sonia: And you don't have one of those at school.

Matson: No. (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, January 13, 2010)

Matson could name a book he liked to read but did not think the school had that book. I wondered if there were books at school Matson liked to take out to read. Did he know where to look in the library when he searched for books he might like? I tried to know more about his reading in school.

Sonia: So, when do you read at school?

Matson: Hmmm, when the teacher says.

Sonia: In the morning, first thing, often you read, right?

Matson: Uh huh.

Sonia: And you don't like reading then.

Matson: Not that much.

Sonia: Hmm. And then do you read after that?

Matson: No. Not anymore after that.

Sonia: So you only read first thing in the morning?

Matson: Uh huh. (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, January 13, 2010)

Mrs. Henry was diligent about the silent reading; children in her class read every morning unless there was a special activity that disrupted the regular schedule (Field notes, September 2009—February 2010). I wondered what would have made the activity more interesting for Matson.

I asked Matson more questions about reading, but this time, in the context of his home, not at school.

Sonia: So, at home, do you sometimes . . . decide to read a book?

Matson: Uh huh.

Sonia: Or you read because you have to?

Matson: No, when I get bored sometimes I read.

Sonia: Oh, really.

M: Uh huh.

Sonia: But that's only when you're bored, and you have nothing else to do. And does your mom ask you to read every day?

Matson: No. (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, January 13, 2010)

Reading did not seem to be an activity that drew Matson; he chose to read when he was bored. His mother commented on how she did not “think reading [was] his favourite thing” (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010). She thought he would rather play Lego® or something else (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010). Marie knew how her son felt about reading. In my effort to try to understand what made reading so unattractive to Matson, I asked more questions.

Sonia: If you were a teacher, in Grade 2, would you tell your students to read every day?

Matson: Nooooooooooooo!

Sonia: No. What would you do?

Matson: I would just tell them to read twice . . . like one day and then not the next day.

Sonia: At school?

Matson: Uh huh. (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, January 13, 2010)

Matson’s reaction to what he would do if he were the teacher substantiated his dislike for reading. However, he would still have his students read every other day which tells me he would not completely free them from it, thus indicating he valued reading to a certain extent. I asked him more questions.

Sonia: Do you sometimes find it difficult to pick a book?

Matson: Sometimes when people [take it before] me.

Sonia: Oh, the [book] you wanted?

Matson: Uh huh.

Sonia: Do you sometimes find there is no book you want to read?

Matson: Yes. (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, January 13, 2010)

Choosing a book is critical in the reading process. It does not appear to me that Matson found that step easy; he remarked on not being able to have the book he wanted, or not finding one he wanted to read.

Even though Matson did not seem to like reading, he had improved his reading skills and he knew he had (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, January 18, 2010). To help her students learn to read, Mrs. Henry played the Smarties Game. Matson liked that game because he could read most words and earned Smarties (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, December 9, 2009). He explained how he read some words:

Matson: You just put your hand on one and read this part, and then read that one.

Sonia: Oh, so you kind of break your word in two?

Matson: Yeah. . . . like this, awe—some. (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, December 9, 2009)

Matson seemed confident about his ability to read the words during the Smarties Game and could describe a strategy he used to read them. Mrs. Henry shared with me she started using that game to motivate one of her students:

The reason I started that was one year I had a kid and she thought it was funny if she didn't know anything. It was so funny if she played dumb and couldn't read anything, and I knew it was a put on for a lot of it. So, okay, let's start a game where you're rewarded for knowing it. So, that's why I started that game . . . I thought okay, . . . then there's a little bit of . . . reason to try . . . 'cause they get a Smartie. . . . All of a sudden, she knew more than she was letting on before.  
(Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, October 28, 2009)

Mrs. Henry found the game helped her student perform according to her abilities and has been using it since. She added she gave more hints to her lower group of readers “‘cause [she] want[ed] them to be successful and [wanted] them to get the Smartie” (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, October 28, 2009). Mrs. Henry had previously mentioned to me that she thought helping children *be successful* was important when they learned to read (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, October 28, 2009). She helped the *lower group of readers* feel successful, thus, earn a Smartie, by giving them more hints.

Mrs. Henry strongly focused on reading in her class, and it was usually the only homework her students had to do beside studying for the spelling tests. Generally, Matson’s participation in the reading activities proposed by his teacher was not constant; he enjoyed reading aloud and playing the Smarties Game but did not seem to appreciate reading on his own, during silent reading or at home reading.

### **About Home Reading—Marie**

“[Matson] won’t come in after school. He drops his bag in the house and he’s gone” (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009), Marie explained early in the school year when I asked what her son did after school. She shared he liked to ride his bike, play with Lego® blocks, make forts with his friend, play computer games, go sledding, and shovel snow in the winter (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). Marie added:

They come home, they have a snack and they just, they don't want to even look at their stuff [homework] . . . They want to go sledding. So, I’m like, ah, let them go. I know some parents make them sit and do it right away. . . . My mom always



let us have a snack and go play, and then do it [homework]. (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010)

Marie indicated that her children read “either right before supper, or right after supper . . . but often, it [was] a little bit later, before bed . . . not super late” (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010). Marie grew up with a mother who allowed her children to relax and eat after school as opposed to doing homework right when they came home. Now that she was a parent, she chose to do what her mother did and give her children a break after school.

Home reading was still a challenge for Marie who had to listen to three of her children read to her. At the beginning of the year, she was uncertain about what to do with Matson’s home reading; she phoned Mrs. Henry to tell her, “[Matson was] not bringing any books home” (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). Marie was used to finding books in Matson’s backpack in Grade 1. She decided to phone Mrs. Henry because there were no books in his bag for him to read at home. She learned that it was otherwise in Grade 2. Marie remembered seeing a letter the teacher wrote and recalled it explained:

a little bit about reading but nothing . . . much, really . . . [I] didn’t realize [what] we were supposed to do . . . [Mrs. Henry] said, “She wrote it somewhere”. I guess I must have missed it. (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009)

Marie added, “I didn’t really get any clear instructions this year. I felt a little bit confused about the reading until I actually went in there and then she said, . . . ‘It’s just library books or books from home’” (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009).

When Marie told me about the misunderstanding regarding Matson's home reading, she recollected being confused about home reading in the past as well:

Well, you know . . . in Kindergarten . . . they'd bring a book home and I'd read it but last year, I [was] mixed up . . . [Mrs. Taylor] sent home the books and I thought that I was supposed to be reading [them] to him still, and he was supposed to be reading [them] to me. So I'd read to him for months before I realized he was supposed to be reading. (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009)

Once Marie understood how the home reading program worked, she realized they had to write the titles of the books Matson read to her; she noted she had not marked them down yet and should start doing it (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). When I saw Marie at the skating rink a couple weeks later, she told me she always forgets to write down what Matson has read; she explained how it is easier with Monica because she has a book per night while Matson reads whatever, whenever (Field notes, November 4, 2009). In December, Marie shared again that she forgot to write down which books her son read; she observed, however, that Matson read *a lot* and read to his dad as well, but she did not know if they wrote down the books (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, December 9, 2009). In February, she talked about how she told Matson "It's your job to write them down. . . . He doesn't write them down 'cause I looked and . . . he hasn't written anything down" (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010). Documenting the reading he did at home did not appear to be a priority for Matson, even though his mother asked him to do so.

Mrs. Henry tried to encourage her students to record the titles of the books they read on their home reading sheet. One day in November, I noticed her checking the students' home reading envelopes and putting stickers on some of the children's sheets (Field notes, November 4, 2009). She rewarded students with a sticker once they filled a sheet with book titles. That same day, Mrs. Henry commented about Matson and other classmates for not bringing their home reading envelopes back to school more often (Field notes, November 4, 2009). I asked Marie if the rewards Mrs. Henry gave the children motivated Matson to document his reading; she did not think it did (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010). Mrs. Henry seemed somewhat concerned about Matson's home reading:

He never brings his library books back. Well, I wouldn't say never, but they're always late and overdue . . . Maybe their household is kind of chaotic . . . with four kids, I would think it could maybe be, [with] three boys. (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, October 28, 2009)

When Matson was in Grade 1, Marie shared how challenging it was to manage the homework for all her children (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009); Grade 2 was not that different. She explained:

Sometimes . . . all three kids . . . have to be read to, and there's a lot of books . . . and it gets kind of frustrating. And Monica really demands the attention . . . She [has] like five books out and it's like, she just overruns the boys. I'm like, "Monica, you have to listen". Or else, they'll be reading and she'll just start reading her book out loud. So, two reading at once . . . Sometimes I say, "OK,

we're all going to silent read" . . . And actually, that's worked better with Matson.

(Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010)

Marie tried to support her children with their homework and home reading as best as she could. It helped her manage to have strategies, such as the silent reading she used for home reading.

At the beginning of Grade 2, Marie shared that she noticed Matson seemed more interested in reading; "When Monica brings her books home, now he grabs them and wants to read them. . . . Last year, he wouldn't even really try to read" (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). Matson appeared to be more interested in reading in Grade 2 although his mother found he could be *hard to motivate* (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). She noted she needed to *catch him at the right time* because he would *goof* around when he was too tired (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010). She said Matson loved to listen to her or his grandmother read him books (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009; December 9, 2009). Unlike Monica who enjoyed trying to read her books herself, Matson preferred to be read to, rather than to read himself (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, December 9, 2009).

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, now that Monica was learning to read, Matson wanted to read the books she brought home; Marie thought her son wanted to impress his sister (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). She recalled Matson saying, "I can read faster than you Monica" (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). She considered her son very competitive and thought he was more motivated to read now than before his sister started to read (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010).

Marie found some of the library books Matson brought home to read had long paragraphs and were too difficult for him (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). When that happened, she read to him (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). I asked Marie what kind of books Matson liked to read. She mentioned that he liked to read his father's *Mustang*<sup>111</sup> magazine, the *Guinness World Book of Records* and the *Ripley's Believe It or Not*<sup>112</sup> but noted he needed help reading them (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010). Marie shared with me how Matson:

had one [book] from school [about] trucks. . . . He just did not want to give it back to the school. It was terrible. It was embarrassing 'cause I'd keep getting notes home. And I'd put it in his bag . . . and [he would] hide it, then bring it back home again. (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010).

Even though Marie tried to help her son return books to school to bring new ones home, he did not always return them. Consequently, he could not bring new books home unless he returned the ones he had to the library.

Mrs. Henry wanted her students to identify a goal towards which they would work (Field notes, November 4, 2009). During the student-led conferences in November, the students chose a goal, in cooperation with their parents and their teacher. As a reminder, Mrs. Henry stuck a piece of paper in the shape of a teddy bear to each child's desk on which she wrote their goal; Matson's teddy bear bore "home reading" (Field notes, December 2, 2009). Marie reported that the goal set for her son was to write down the books he read at home and stressed the teacher indicated Matson needed to write them

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<sup>111</sup> Mustang is a brand of car.

<sup>112</sup> There are numerous books from the *Guinness World Records* and *Ripley's Believe It or Not* Series.

himself (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, December 9, 2009). Marie seemed to agree with giving Matson that responsibility, but despite his mother and teacher's wish that he wrote down the books he read, I do not believe Matson ever really did it.

Marie was an avid reader (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009) and I believe she wanted her children to like reading, or at least, become competent readers. Even though managing home reading and homework for four children was demanding, Marie found a way to juggle her family schedule respecting each child's dispositions. She told me Matson read more in Grade 2 and had improved from Grade 1 (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009); she did not appear to worry about his academic abilities. Later in February, she recalled how she felt Matson was not that comfortable reading books in Grade 1 and still *struggled* until the end of the year (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010). She noticed his reading *took off* in Grade 2 and added, "I've heard that from other mothers actually" (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010). Marie shared, "Out of all my kids, he's always been pretty even-keeled on everything, and he seem[ed] to not have any problems. I knew it would come" (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010). Her husband, on the other hand, seemed to worry more than she did. Marie explained he *struggled* in school and did not want his children to struggle as he did (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010). She assumed this motivated him to keep drilling Matson with the key words Mrs. Taylor provided them in Grade 1 (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010).

Matson and I did not discuss home reading extensively. As noted earlier, he said he did not like to read (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, December 2, 2009). Reading did not appear to be an activity of choice for Matson.

## **No More Conversations in School—Matson, Marie**

In February 2010, I ended my visits to the school. The last day I was there, the children gave me Valentine's Day cards; Matson's card was meticulously designed and put together; he wrote in it, "Dear Madam Houle, thank you for coming to our school and bringing me up stairs in the little room. Love, Matson" (Artefact, February 8, 2010). He later told his mother he was sad I was gone but was happy I would visit him at home (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010).

## **Revisiting Matson's Worries from Grade 1—Matson, Sonia**

When I visited Matson at home, his parents were out; his older brothers Austin and Bradley were there (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, April 24, 2010). I asked if we could go to his creek to which he promptly answered, "yes" (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, April 24, 2010). While we walked, Matson showed me specific areas in the creek where he built something, his current works in progress, where he snowboarded and did *jumps* with his bike (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, April 24, 2010). Our unstructured conversation took place in a location Matson loved and with which he was familiar. This probably helped make him more open to talking with me, as opposed to sitting next to each other and having to answer my questions. At one point during our walk through the creek, I reminded Matson about a comment he made to his mother.

Sonia:            You know, there was something else I wanted to ask you. . . . It  
                         was your mom who told me. . . . You told her, in Grade 1 . . . you  
                         were worried you were going to fail. Do you remember that? And

I said to your mom “Why would he think he would fail”? And she said, “I don’t know, he didn’t tell me”.

Matson: I know.

Sonia: Do you think you’re going to fail Grade 2?

Matson: No.

Sonia: No? So why did you think, last year, you would fail but not this year? Were you doing good in Grade 1?

Matson: Not that good. A little bit and then . . .

Sonia: You were a little bit . . . a little bit good or a little bit not good?

Matson: A little bit not good.

Sonia: Was that at the beginning or at the end . . . ?

Matson: Like, at the end.

Sonia: What were you doing that wasn’t good?

(He saws a piece of wood from a bridge he is building in the creek.)

Matson: Like not getting stuff right.

Sonia: Oh, like when writing or . . .

Matson: Yes, writing, hmmm, math, science . . .

(He saws again.)

Sonia: But in Grade 2, you’re doing better.

Matson: Uh huh.

Sonia: Do you think Monica thinks she’s going to fail?

Matson: No.

Sonia: Did your brothers think like you, that they might fail?



Matson: No.

Sonia: Just you?

Matson: Uh huh . . . (He keeps sawing.)

Sonia: So, the things you weren't doing so good, how did you know you weren't doing good?

Matson: 'Cause I got Xs on them.

Sonia: Oh, you got Xs, oh. Was that math or reading, or writing?

Matson: Writing, . . . sometimes science.

Sonia: So, you didn't like getting Xs?

Matson: No.

Sonia: And this year you don't get Xs?

Matson: No. (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, April 24, 2010)

Matson remembered thinking he might fail in Grade 1 and was able to talk about it with me. When his mother inquired into his comment about failing, he could not tell her. Interestingly, by the end of Grade 2, a school year he perceived as *easier*, he could tell why he thought he might fail. Matson referred to Xs he saw on his schoolwork. He did not like to see Xs on his work and assumed he was *not that good*. When I shared with Marie why Matson thought he might fail, she was surprised; "I didn't think Mrs. Taylor used Xs"<sup>113</sup>. . . . Oh, maybe the spelling. . . . You know, she would be horrified to know that, wouldn't she? She'd be upset" (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, July 13, 2010). I believe Marie storied Mrs. Taylor as a teacher who gave positive and constructive

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<sup>113</sup> Mrs. Taylor remarked that indeed, she never uses Xs with her students (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, October 12, 2012).

comments to her students; Xs did not seem to belong in that story line. Matson's comment concerning the possibility of failing his grade and his assumption that nobody else in his family had similar thoughts intrigued me. He knew his brother Bradley had difficulties in school (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, April 24, 2010); why would he not think Bradley might fail too?

I wondered how Matson anticipated his Grade 3 year. At the end of Grade 1, he told me he thought Grade 2 would be fun; he would do math, art, and draw (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 22, 2010). However, just before school started, Marie shared with me Matson was scared Grade 2 would be hard, and he was anxious about homework (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, August 26, 2009). At the end of April in Grade 2, I asked Matson about Grade 3.

Sonia:           And do you think Grade 3 will be easy or hard?

Matson:       Harder. (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, April 24, 2010)

Matson presumed Grade 3 would be harder than Grade 2. I sensed uncertainty in Matson's forward looking story of himself in Grade 3.

### **Grade 2 Year End—Matson, Sonia**

In Grade 1, Matson told me he did not want school to end (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 18, 2009). When I reminded him of that by spring of Grade 2, he laughed and said he wanted Grade 2 to end so he could play (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, April 24, 2010). Even though he was a more successful student in Grade 2 than what he experienced in Grade 1, he still wanted school to end.

During the month of June 2010, Matson took swimming lessons after school. I went to the pool one day to watch him (Field notes, June 15, 2010). He was extremely focused and attentive while his instructor spoke, and he worked hard practising to swim (Field notes, June 15, 2010). The Matson I saw at the pool behaved far differently from the mischievous boy he could be in the classroom. I let myself imagine him in Grade 3 and wondered how he would be storied.

## **Epilogue**

Matson finished his Grade 3 year at Ramsey Elementary School and was still there for Grade 4 when I met him in September 2011; he was in the same class as his friend Brent (Transcript Sonia & Matson, September 21, 2011). When I met with Marie to negotiate the narrative accounts, she did not mention anything about Matson's reading or about his schoolwork.

In the last two chapters, I shared Tiny Tim's and Matson's Grade 2 narrative accounts. In the next chapter, I inquire into the boys' accounts over the course of the two school years and pull threads from the boys' stories.

## Chapter Ten: Looking Across the Boys' Narrative Accounts

The narrative accounts I co-composed with all participants made visible the lives of two schoolboys as they became readers and of their struggles to become readers. The stories, put side by side, helped me awaken and attend to certain threads. I chose to pause and inquire into two of them: the silences on school and home landscapes and familial curriculum making (Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin, 2011).

### Silences on Two Landscapes: School and Homes

My position as a researcher in relation with participants afforded me unique opportunities to hear their stories, stories they might not have shared with others. Because I engaged in a multiperspectival narrative inquiry, and because I was guided by relational ethics, I shared with all participants the multiple perspectives included in this research project. I reminded the participants during the negotiation of the narrative accounts that I would be sharing the narrative accounts with the other participants. I wanted to ensure they knew what they read alongside me in the narrative accounts would also be read by other participants. Of all the following excerpts I considered *silences*<sup>114</sup>, none were identified to be removed; the participants agreed for them to be included in the narrative accounts and shared with everyone.

- Marie did not tell Mrs. Taylor that Matson worried about failing Grade 1; she kept it silent from Mrs. Taylor.

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<sup>114</sup> Silence is a “complete absence of sound” (Oxford Reference Online). Although silences might be a simple absence of sound, it can be the result of a decision to remain silent, or can be imposed by someone, including the person who is silenced.

- Mrs. Taylor did not tell Morgan that Tiny Tim was not quite where she might want him to be for beginning of Grade 2; she kept it silent from Morgan.
- Tiny Tim did not tell Mrs. Taylor he did not like reading; he kept it silent from Mrs. Taylor.
- Morgan did not tell Mrs. Taylor that Tiny Tim did not like to read; she kept it silent from Mrs. Taylor.
- Morgan did not tell Mrs. Henry about Travis choking Tiny Tim in Grade 1, and how Tiny Tim was scared of him; she kept it silent from Mrs. Henry.
- Morgan did not tell Mrs. Henry that Tiny Tim felt he did not get the recognition he deserved with the home reading program; she kept it silent from Mrs. Henry.
- Morgan did not tell Mrs. Henry that Tiny Tim was scared to talk to her; she kept it silent from Mrs. Henry.
- Morgan was frustrated with the reading tests and with her difficulty to understand the grading scale. She did not tell Mrs. Henry; she kept it silent from her.
- Morgan and Tiny Tim<sup>115</sup> felt a school administrator did not take them seriously when they reported incidents to him. I do not think they told him; they kept it silent from him.
- Marie said Matson told her his teacher was mean, but she did not tell Mrs. Henry about it; she kept it silent from her.

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<sup>115</sup> Morgan told me Tiny Tim felt his school administrator did not take him seriously. Tiny Tim did not tell me that.

- Morgan shared with me how she felt Mrs. Henry brushed her off, and how she found it difficult to communicate with her. She did not tell Mrs. Henry about it; she kept it silent from her.
- Tiny Tim told me he did not like tests. I do not believe he told his teachers; he kept it silent from them.
- Tiny Tim told me his hand gets really hot and sweaty when he writes. I do not believe he told his teachers; he kept it silent from them.
- I do not believe Marie told Mrs. Henry that Matson read Monica's books for the home reading program; she kept it silent from her.
- Matson told me he did not like to read because it was not fun. I do not think he told his teachers; he kept it silent from them.
- Mrs. Henry told me Tiny Tim did not progress as she hoped. She did not tell Morgan about that; she kept it silent from Morgan.

The number of silences listed above show how they permeated the study; I wanted to inquire into some of them because I was intrigued by the frequency of stories participants told me, stories I perceived as intentionally, or unintentionally, withheld information. For purposes of this chapter, I chose two silences that represented the three groups involved in my study (parents, teachers, and children):

1. Morgan did not tell Mrs. Henry that Tiny Tim was scared to talk to her; she kept it silent from Mrs. Henry. (A silence from Morgan and Tiny Tim.)

2. Mrs. Taylor did not tell Morgan that Tiny Tim was not quite where she might want him to be for beginning of Grade 2; she kept it silent from Morgan. (A silence from Mrs. Taylor.)

I chose to inquire into Morgan and Tiny Tim's silence because it addressed an aspect I find significant in curriculum making in schools: the relationships between a child and his teacher and between a parent and her child's teacher. I chose to inquire into Mrs. Taylor's silence because I wanted to understand how she came to tell different reading assessment stories of Tiny Tim.

**Sharing Morgan's silent story of Tiny Tim.** In January 2012, I met with Mrs. Henry to share Tiny Tim's narrative accounts (Chapters 6 & 9) with her. When she read the part where Morgan said her son was scared of her, we remained silent for a few seconds (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, January 9, 2012). I then told her one of my stories, a story I kept silent for 15 years; I remembered it as this study unfolded. It was about Lola, a child in a Grade 1 class I taught. At a parent-teacher interview, Lola's parents told me their daughter was scared of me; she felt pressured and felt I was impatient with her. I was devastated to hear them say that to me. I felt terrible and remembered telling them it was exactly the opposite of what I was there to do. Mrs. Henry listened to my story. I told her I was grateful Lola's parents came to tell me. She agreed with me (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, January 9, 2012). We pondered about parents who keep these kinds of stories silent from their children's teachers. We wondered about what made Lola's parents tell me she was scared.

**Personal parent story.** I shared one more story with Mrs. Henry that day; this one was not a teacher story but a parent story. I talked about the time I told one of my children's teachers, a personal acquaintance, that what he did to remind my 6-year-old daughter to hold her pencil properly, hurt her. I recalled how I saw him at a school function and decided to talk to him. I chose not to keep that story silent. I told Mrs. Henry I approached the teacher and shared with him that Annie told me he physically hurt her. He was surprised and apologized for doing that. I shared with Mrs. Henry how hard it was for me to speak up and tell him how Annie felt when he did that. I felt it required courage on my part. I remarked it took courage for Lola's parents as well to tell me how their daughter felt. I certainly did not mean to harm Lola. Her parents helped me wake up to their daughter's lived curriculum in the classroom. I wonder how many parents do not share their concerns with their children's teachers. How many stories and of which kinds are kept silent on school landscapes, in the spaces among children, parents and teachers?

**The courage to tell.** My wonders around the courage to speak up brought me to inquire into why I felt I needed courage to share with Mrs. Henry the comments made about her by Tiny Tim. Why did I? Goldstein (1997), an early childhood<sup>116</sup> educator and feminist scholar, argued that "[i]n the field of early childhood education, in particular, it is impossible to tease apart the twin strands of education and care" (p. 3). Goldstein's work around care (Noddings, 1984) encouraged her to use the word *love* as she saw it well "suited to classroom life . . . a word that kids could understand" (Goldstein, 1997, p.

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<sup>116</sup> *Early childhood* "encompasses both the custodial care and the education of children from birth through age eight" (Goldstein, 1997, p. 3). The boys in this study were eight or under in Grades 1 and 2.



2). Her conversations “with teachers in classrooms, staff rooms, faculty lounges . . . and elementary schools around the country suggest[ed] that love for students [was] an underlying assumption of the practices of many, many early childhood teachers” (Goldstein, 1997, p. 7). I believe teachers are, in general, storied as caring and loving people in relation with their students. Goldstein’s (1997) work showed others in the educational field who storied teachers as such. As a parent, I expect teachers to be caring and loving with my children, and I have that expectation of myself in the stories I tell about who I am as a teacher. I was devastated when Lola’s parents told me she was scared of me. It interrupted the story I was telling of who I was.

It worried me to share with Mrs. Henry that Tiny Tim was scared to talk to her. I thought she might feel inadequate, not caring. I did not want her to feel judged; it was not the purpose of my research. Keeping Morgan’s story of Tiny Tim silent would have meant that I silenced it; I could not do that. It would not have been coherent with the nature of this multiperspectival study. I had to share the story with Mrs. Henry. In order to do so, I needed courage to tell what I believed was a conflicting story<sup>117</sup> (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Huber et al., 2011) to the story Mrs. Henry told herself, of who she was and of many early childhood educators, as caring individuals with their students. I worried that telling Morgan’s story to Mrs. Henry might harm Mrs. Henry and bump against the relational ethics I believed was a foundation for my work as a narrative inquirer. However, to honour all the participants in the study, I felt I had to tell the story; I could not keep it silent.

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<sup>117</sup> Clandinin & Connelly (1996) and Huber et al. (2011) wrote about conflicting stories, “stories that are unable to coexist and result in one or another story becoming dominant” (p. 52).

**Meeting of stories told by multiple participants.** One purpose of this research is to make space to learn about multiple perspectives, including children's, parents' and teachers, and from that, to try to understand children's school experiences. Each participant told me stories from their own perspective. When I wrote the narrative accounts, those stories became intertwined; I positioned them next to other participants' stories. This process exposed stories initially shared in the intimacy of the conversations I had with each participant, a space we co-constructed through caring and trusting relationships. In a way, I was the participants' confidante; I heard their various stories, the stories they chose to tell me. Although each participant shared stories with me, they did not share them in the presence of the other participants. What each of them chose to tell me during the private conversations might not have been shared if other participants had been listening. In the narrative accounts, I positioned the participants' stories in relation with each other depending on each story fragment. The telling of each boy's story, in his respective narrative account, resulted from piecing together various stories. Negotiating these narrative accounts with each participant created tension for me. Intimate conversations became public conversations with the composing and sharing of the narrative accounts in which other participants were represented. Whether participants would have shared, or not, their stories in the presence of other participants, they were aware that I would later share them with everyone. I imagine the relational and intimate context of the conversations with each participant facilitated the sharing of their lived experiences.

**About Morgan's silent story.** Inquiring into the silences on the school and home landscapes raised many questions for me. Were stories silenced by others? Did the

participants silence their stories? Were stories just silent? Whose stories were silenced? Who decided not to tell his/her stories? Why keep stories silent? Is a silent story necessarily silenced by someone?

Hibbitts (2009) studied her experiences as a mother in the context of the Kindergarten to Grade 12 school system; she noticed some of her stories were silenced, and that she silenced other stories. Thiesmeyer (2003), a discourse theorist, explained:

Silence can be, or can seem to be, the result of personal choice, but silencing clearly involves choices made by other people as well as by the potential speaker. The action of silencing is accompanied by social and political judgements of what is acceptable and unacceptable. For this reason, silencing offers the chance to see how discursive actions operate within the social field. Silencing can produce different forms within a community of discourse: unwanted silencing, complied-in silencing, even unrealised, or . . . self-imposed silencing. To begin to understand silencing, then, we must not only look at the imposition of one discourse on another, but also at the social and discursive boundaries among imposition, compliance, and self-silencing. (p. 2).

Although my intentions are not to elaborate on discourse analysis, I found Thiesmeyer's (2003) words insightful. She reminded me to look at the nested milieus of my participants stories. Thinking about stories and silences within the three-dimensional inquiry space of narrative inquiry, I unpacked Morgan's silent story about her son who was scared to talk to his teacher. Did Morgan silence the story herself? If she did, why would she choose to silence a story that made her son uncomfortable in school? Did she feel silenced by someone or something? Did she think it would be too risky to tell and

worried there would be consequences for her son? Did she believe no one would listen? Did she think telling her story would not change anything?

*Inquiring into Morgan's silent story with the metaphor of protectorate.*

Pushor's (2001) work on the positioning of parents on the landscape of schools drew on a metaphor of protectorate (Memmi, 1990) to understand parents' positioning on that landscape. Puzzling over the silences I noticed in my study, I found Pushor's (2001) work insightful in relation to parents' and children's stories. The idea of protectorate emerged from colonialism (Memmi, 1990) where "the colonizer states . . . the colonized is a weakling . . . thereby . . . [his] deficiency requires protection [and from] this comes the concept of protectorate" (pp. 147—148). Pushor (2001) used the metaphor of protectorate "to think about schooling [and saw] how educators bring their professional knowledge of teaching and learning into a community with the intention of enhancing children's education and enhancing parents' ability to support their children's education" (p. 244). In Pushor's concept, the teachers then become the *protectors* of parents and children, who in turn, become the *protected*, those who need help (protection) with their education. Teachers are the providers of this help and protection because of their official credentials. This socially constructed positioning is only possible through the complicity of the protector and the protected who co-compose these stories (Pushor, 2001, pp. 244—245). Pushor, a former teacher, recalled how she, as a protector, "request[ed] meetings with parents to share [her] knowledge, [and how] parents came to [her] asking for advice about reading strategies and parenting concerns" (p. 245). Parents' requests for advice and teachers' advice in response represents a common story in schools. Pushor (2001) brought attention to educators' "expert knowledge of teaching and learning . . . [which]

puts them in a superior position over less-knowing parents” (p. 246). In a protectorate, protectors are experts and parents have *dependent trust* in their protectors, the teachers (Pushor, 2001). Pushor (2001) pointed out the difficulty for parents to contradict the teachers, whom Fine (1987) called “those who know” (p. 164). On a school landscape, the structure grants educators control over parents which consequently shapes “how educators and families learn to live in relation with one another” (Pushor, 2001, p. 254).

Using a metaphor of protectorate to reflect on Morgan’s silent story made me wonder if Morgan responded to the situation as the protected who would not question her protector, the one *who knew*. Was she silenced by her protector’s status? Did Morgan feel uncomfortable to share her son’s story of his teacher, a person in a higher position in the hierarchy of the school? Did she think telling her story would not matter? Did she wonder what would happen if she shared her concerns with Mrs. Henry, and how it might affect Tiny Tim’s lived experiences? Did she silence herself intentionally?

Pushor (2001) found parents were often silenced in schools while educators maintained a hierarchical position over them. Unless teachers are awake to this notion, they might not be aware of the silencing parents and children experience as they try to make curriculum with them. After reading about Morgan feeling brushed off by her, Mrs. Henry shared she was sorry Morgan felt like that and wished she had told her (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Henry, January 9, 2012). Unless Mrs. Henry realized her position as protector in her relationship with Morgan and consequently levelled the ground, I doubt Morgan would have told her about her son’s fear.

Returning to Lola’s story, I wonder how I did not notice that I scared her. Although I felt devastated to hear her parents tell me she was scared of me, I am grateful

they did. I do not believe fear is conducive to educational experiences. I am reminded of Krishnamurti's (1964) words about fear:

It is really very important while you are young to live in an environment in which there is no fear . . . Where there is fear there is no intelligence . . . You cannot inquire, observe, learn, you cannot be deeply aware, if you are afraid. (pp. 11 & 13).

How did Tiny Tim experience school when he felt scared to talk to his teacher? Did it stop him from inquiring, observing, and learning which would have been Mrs. Henry's and his mother's hope for him?

**Mrs. Taylor's silenced assessment stories<sup>118</sup>.** The teachers lived silences as well. Morgan told me Tiny Tim did "really well on his report card" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, June 30, 2010), whereas Mrs. Henry shared with me he did not progress as she had hoped (Field notes, June 23, 2010); Mrs. Henry kept that story silent from Morgan. Mrs. Taylor shared similar concerns at the end of Grade 1, but Morgan did not seem to know about those concerns. I puzzled over the different stories told about Tiny Tim's achievement.

Inquiring into the stories repeatedly awakened me and led me to inquire into my practice. As well, I think I told colleagues student assessment stories that were different from those I told those students' parents. I do not recall ever wondering about the differences in the stories I told. I also remembered when my daughter Annie was in Grade 1; her year-end report card revealed nothing about her struggle with reading. I

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<sup>118</sup>I refer to *assessment stories* as stories about the processes by which teachers make judgements about their students' learning. In the processes of assessing, teachers sometimes have to use standards by which they determine students' achievement.

wondered about it but did not feel the need to understand why nothing was mentioned about Annie's reading struggles. I could judge her skills myself as I had previously been a Grade 1 teacher. My priority at that time was to help Annie grow as a reader and a learner. I realize now that I did not tell my assessment story of Annie to her teacher; I kept it silent. I chose not to tell it because it was not a priority for me at that time to inquire into that discrepancy. That story just remained silent.

When I met Morgan in December 2011 to negotiate Tiny Tim's narrative account, she shared that her son did not appear to be reading at the expected level in Grade 4 (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 12, 2011). During the reading of the narrative account, we came upon a part where she told me Tiny Tim came out *reading at grade level*; she immediately shared that she did not think he read at grade level then (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 12, 2011). I sensed Morgan worried about her son. In retrospect, she wished she had been told sooner that he struggled; she said she would have looked for extra help for him, had she known he struggled (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, December 12, 2011).

In mid-January 2012, I wrote an email message to Mrs. Taylor, and I discussed her comments on Tiny Tim's Grade 1 (2009) report card. I asked her to review the following excerpt from Tiny Tim's Grade 1 narrative account (Chapter 6) where Morgan spoke of Tiny Tim's year-end report card. I also asked her to let me know if my wondering, about the possibility that she did not want to alarm Tiny Tim's parents by saying he was where he should be, was representative of how she thought.

[Mrs. Taylor] says, like, he's doing well. She says that he came out at the end reading at grade level . . . where he should be at the end of grade 1. He wasn't

higher, he wasn't lower, he was right where he should be" (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009). The separate conversations I had with Morgan and with Mrs. Taylor<sup>119</sup> showed different interpretations of Tiny Tim's reading level. Even though Mrs. Taylor told me Tiny Tim was not reading at the desired level to enter Grade 2, Morgan heard her say that her son was where he should be. I wondered if Mrs. Taylor decided not to alarm Tiny Tim's parents by saying he was where he should be since he was not far from the expected reading level. (Quote from Tiny Tim's Grade 1 narrative account in Chapter 6)

In her email response, Mrs. Taylor stated:

I would never intentionally give an inaccurate impression of a child's performance for any reason, including sparing parents' feelings. I believe it is my responsibility to report honestly . . . This really makes me realize how important reporting can become when a child is struggling. My evaluation of his reading would have been based on a passage from the DRA<sup>120</sup>, knowledge of sight words, writing and running records done on a variety of passages and progress. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, January 22, 2012)

Mrs. Taylor added in a subsequent email message:

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<sup>119</sup> Mrs. Taylor did not think it would "be worth [for Tiny Tim to spend] another year in Grade 1" (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009) even though she felt he did not *master* the Grade 1 curriculum (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). She added: "What I communicated with [the mother] should reflect that he did achieve a lot . . . There's work to do . . . It has to do with his age . . . It's just a matter of giving him a little more time" (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). Mrs. Taylor explained that Tiny Tim needed "support to complete tasks . . . in his writing and, and reading" (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). She estimated that he made the equivalent of a "year's worth in progress . . . but [was] not quite where you might want him to be at the beginning of Grade 2. . . . I don't like assigning numbers . . . but in general terms, I think he [was] about 1.7" (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). Mrs. Taylor indicated that Tiny Tim progressed a year's worth during his Grade 1 year.

<sup>120</sup> DRA stands for Developmental Reading Assessment, a tool approved by the Alberta Government that teachers use for assessing students' reading skills.



I would have explained the range that would be considered “grade level” and shown her where Tiny Tim scored. Morgan would have been aware that he scored in the low range. Likely, I was reassuring and said that is nothing to be alarmed about. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, January 23, 2012)

While Morgan reported to me Tiny Tim “came out reading at grade level” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009), Mrs. Taylor told me Tiny Tim felt “the struggle” (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, June 1, 2009), that he had progressed “but [was] not quite where you might want him to be at the beginning of Grade 2” (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009). She also helped me choose him as a participant in my study because he struggled to read. I wondered at the different interpretations of Tiny Tim’s reading skills I heard from each participant. Why were they so different, just as were Annie’s reading assessment stories (mine and the report card) in Grade 1?

Mrs. Taylor explained how she assessed Tiny Tim’s reading and discussed the range she used to evaluate his performance. Even though Tiny Tim scored in the low range, he was within the *grade level range*. Mrs. Taylor reassured Morgan and told her “He was where he should be at the end of Grade 1” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009). Mrs. Taylor reported on Tiny Tim’s reading skills according to the standards teachers were required to use. Why, then, do I see such a gap between Morgan’s perception of her son’s performance and Mrs. Taylor’s? Why do the two stories of Tiny Tim not match?

***Stories to live by.*** Clandinin and Connelly (1996) argued that teacher knowledge is shaped by the professional knowledge context within which they find themselves. In their paper titled “Teachers’ Professional Knowledge Landscapes: Teacher stories—

Stories of Teachers–School Stories–Stories of Schools” (1996), they explained how teachers’ stories about themselves, about the school, and about their students are shaped by their professional knowledge context. Clandinin and Connelly’s (1996) conceptualization of the professional knowledge landscape of teachers helped me think about Mrs. Taylor’s stories of Tiny Tim. I inquired into Mrs. Taylor’s professional knowledge context to see how it might have shaped her knowledge of Tiny Tim’s reading achievement and her stories about Tiny Tim.

At Ramsey Elementary School where Mrs. Taylor had been teaching for many years, there were stories of school around having all students achieve academic success and providing quality instruction to meet the learning needs of all students<sup>121</sup> (Ramsey Elementary School Parent Handbook). These stories have the quality of sacred stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Crites, 1971). Crites (1971) described sacred stories as “dwelling-places . . . [in which] men’s sense of self and world is created . . . [These stories] may carry the authority of the scripture for the people who understand their own stories in relation to them” (p. 295). Clandinin and Connelly (1996) borrowed Crites’ notion of sacred stories and used it in relation to school landscapes; they explained:

Researchers, policy makers, senior administrators, and others, using various implementation strategies, push research findings, policy statements, plans, improvement schemes, and so on down what we call the conduit into this out-of-classroom place on the professional knowledge landscape. We characterize this

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<sup>121</sup> This was also mentioned in the documents from Alberta Education, which contributes to making those stories stronger ( <http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/resources/cross/making-a-difference.aspx> )

theory-driven view of practice shared by practitioners, policy makers, and theoreticians as having the quality of a sacred story. (p. 25)

Sacred stories on school landscapes are stories teachers feel they have to live by in out-of-classroom places.

Conversely, in the privacy and safety of their classrooms, teachers live their personal teaching stories referred to as *secret stories* which they only share in secret places, and generally, only with other teachers (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Beside sacred stories and secret stories, teachers live and tell *cover stories* when they find themselves in out-of-classroom places trying to:

fit within acceptable range of the story of school [sacred story] . . . Cover stories enable teachers whose teacher stories are marginalized by whatever the current story of school is to continue to practise and sustain their teacher stories.

(Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25).

Cover stories cover silent or silenced stories. Whenever there is a cover story, there also is a story that is silent or has been silenced. Teachers may cover their secret stories with cover stories in out-of-classroom spaces. Like Clandinin and Connelly (1996), I do not suggest that cover stories and/or secret stories are neither bad nor good (p. 25). Rather, I consider them to be significant stories teachers live and tell while they compose their lives. These notions of stories helped me think about Mrs. Taylor's professional knowledge landscape.

***Stories at Ramsey Elementary School.*** Looking at Mrs. Taylor's professional knowledge landscape, I considered the people present on the school landscape, their relationships, and the various stories lived and told on that specific landscape (Clandinin

& Connelly, 1996). On my first visit to the school, Ken, the principal, took me to Mrs. Taylor's classroom and described her as a *master teacher* (Field notes, May 7, 2009). Ken storied Mrs. Taylor as a master teacher. From the conversation I had with Mrs. Taylor, I believe she told a similar story of herself, more specifically, one of an experienced teacher who always welcomed learning (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, June 12, 2009). Alongside stories of her as master teacher, were the school stories around student achievement and academic success, as well as a story of meeting the learning needs of all students. The report card, a report of Tiny Tim's achievement in an out-of-classroom space, described Tiny Tim reading at grade level and by extension, achieving academic success. On the other hand, the story of Tiny Tim of not quite being ready for Grade 2, a story Mrs. Taylor shared with me was more of a secret story, one shared with another teacher, me. I think both Mrs. Taylor and Mrs. Henry considered me a colleague even though I did not teach at Ramsey School. I was a teacher just as they were, which allowed me to hear secret stories they lived and told while I was in their classrooms. The secret story Mrs. Taylor lived and told in her classroom were based on the personal practical knowledge of a teacher who understood learning to read to be on a continuum (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, January 2, 2012; Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, January 22, 2012), who saw the uniqueness of each of her students, who felt Tiny Tim needed *a little more time*, and who believed that with support from his family, he would become a "really good student by the end of Grade 3" (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009).

My wonders around why Morgan was not told that her son struggled persisted. In the next pages, I tried to make sense of this paradox. Even though I did not know why

both Mrs. Taylor and Mrs. Henry told different stories of Tiny Tim's reading skills to Morgan and to me, I tried to imagine possible plotlines that would explain why Mrs. Taylor did<sup>122</sup>. It is important to keep in mind that while I imagined the following plotlines, I continued to see everyone as well intentioned.

***Plotline 1: Cover story of success.*** Mrs. Taylor did not explain to me why she told me Tiny Tim struggled; she kept it silent in the email response. Rather, she told me what I consider a cover story, one that was coherent with the school's sacred story of students achieving success. Within that sacred story of success, there were stories with the quality of sacred stories; assessment tools within those stories measured students' abilities in reference to predetermined reading levels. Success in school and levels of achievement called *grade levels of achievement*, both social constructions, shaped Tiny Tim's assessment story that Mrs. Taylor shared on the report card and with Morgan. It was compatible with the school sacred story of success, where success was understood through grade levels of achievement.

***Plotline 2: Personal practical knowledge versus sacred story of assessment.*** Mrs. Taylor chose to tell an assessment story congruent with the school sacred story over her secret story. The secret story she had told me in the intimacy of our conversation describing Tiny Tim as not quite ready for Grade 2 remained silent on the report card and in the conversations Mrs. Taylor had with Morgan. Mrs. Taylor composed the secret story she told me from what she knew about Tiny Tim, that is, from her personal practical knowledge of him. That knowledge helped her imagine Tiny Tim in Grade 2. She knew,

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<sup>122</sup> Even though Mrs. Henry also told different assessment stories about Tiny Tim to Morgan and me, I chose to imagine possible plotlines only about Mrs. Taylor because of what I knew she understood about learning to read.

from her extensive experience with young children who learn to read, what was expected of them in Grade 2. Even though Mrs. Taylor understood the process of learning to read to be on a continuum, it contrasted with predetermined levels of achievement defined with benchmarks in the assessment tools<sup>123</sup> of the sacred story of school. Benchmarks do not fit on a continuum. Mrs. Taylor did not write that Tiny Tim was “not quite where you might want him to be at the beginning of Grade 2” (Transcript, Sonia & Mrs. Taylor, August 13, 2009) on the report card<sup>124</sup> nor share it with Morgan. She did not tell that assessment story on these two out-of-classroom places, the report card and the conversation with Morgan. The story Mrs. Taylor could tell from her personal practical knowledge would not match benchmarks and would contradict the sacred story of success, which sees students assigned a grade level of achievement at the end of the school year. Thiesmeyer (2003) explained: “Silencing is a process that works best when disguised, that is, when it displaces the silenced material by means of another discourse, or conceals or filters the unacceptable material through a discourse that is more acceptable” (p. 2). Did the sacred story of assessing with benchmarks, then, become the story that silenced Mrs. Taylor’s story of learning to read to be on a continuum which consequently silenced the secret story of Tiny Tim’s reading assessment she shared with me? I wondered what the consequences would be for Mrs. Taylor if she told assessment stories of students who were not quite ready for the next grade. Would it be too risky for

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<sup>123</sup> In this case, for example, the DRA and lists of sight words (email correspondence, January 22, 2012).

<sup>124</sup> Although Morgan reported that Mrs. Taylor indicated on the report card that Tiny Tim demonstrated *success with support*, which she found confusing, she shared that Mrs. Taylor told her Tiny Tim “came out at the end reading at grade level” (Transcript, Sonia & Morgan, August 31, 2009).

her? Did Mrs. Taylor silence her story of Tiny Tim or was it silenced by the school sacred stories, or was it both?

**Plotline 3: *Matter of time.*** Morgan regularly helped in her son's classroom; she knew where he ranked among the students in the class. She was reassured to be informed he was at grade level in reading. If Mrs. Taylor decided to tell her secret story of Tiny Tim's assessment, it would require spending time explaining to Morgan why he did not progress as expected, and how to move forward with his reading. It would contradict the school's sacred story of assessing with benchmarks which could lead to lengthy discussions with administrators. Schoolteachers have very limited time left after they attend to all aspects of their teaching position. It can be unrealistic and impractical to question such plotlines considering the lack of time in teachers' lives. Telling her secret story of Tiny Tim's assessment would also mean reporting that her student did not achieve at the expected level; it would not fit with the story of academic success for all students. Since Tiny Tim's assessment fit within grade level, why would Mrs. Taylor create such disruption? Would it be worth it?

**Plotline 4: *Metaphor of protectorate.*** At last, I wondered about the metaphor of protectorate (Pushor, 2001). Did Mrs. Taylor act like a protector with Morgan and Tiny Tim when she told the report card cover story? Telling a secret story of Tiny Tim as not ready for Grade 2 would have worried Morgan and would have labelled Tiny Tim. Did Mrs. Taylor try to protect Morgan by reassuring her with an acceptable cover story? Did she refuse to label Tiny Tim as *not quite ready for Grade 2* because she thought that could damage his self-esteem? As a protector, did Mrs. Taylor make the decision to tell a story that would spare Morgan and Tiny Tim from harm? He was within grade level

range after all. With a hopeful forward-looking story, Mrs. Taylor believed that with time and support from his family, Tiny Tim would be a good student by Grade 3. As a protector, she protected Tiny Tim and Morgan with a safe cover assessment.

I do not know if Mrs. Taylor would agree with any of those plotlines; I did not ask her what she thought about them. Imagining plotlines helped me think about what might have happened. I do not pretend to believe that I imagined all the possibilities. There will likely be more plotlines for this paradox in the future. This research awakened me to issues around reporting to parents. Looking across plotlines helped me appreciate the complexity of the lives and the layers of the stories found on the landscape of Ramsey Elementary School.

### **Familial Curriculum Making**

Being in relation with mothers gave me access to the boys' familial landscape and to the stories they lived and told there. I met Morgan and Marie in their homes, saw their neighbourhood, met family members and pets, and was introduced to the environment in which their families lived every day. I saw family pictures on the walls, shoes by the door, clothes hanging on the railings, piles of books on tables, toys on floors, schedules on refrigerators, and food on countertops. I was privileged to be invited into Matson's and Tiny Tim's homes and to have the opportunity to develop what I consider friendships with each mother. We never discussed the nature of our relationships, the mothers and I, but I think they felt I was a friend. When I visited them, they seemed happy to talk with me. They gave me their time; for that, I hoped they would benefit from our relationships.



Huber et al. (2011) in their reconceptualization of curriculum making shed light onto familial curriculum making which they defined as:

an account of parents'/families' and children's lives together in homes and communities where the parents and families are an integral part of the curricular process in which families, children/learners, subject matter, and home and community milieus are in dynamic interaction. (Huber et al., 2011, pp. 7—8)

As a guest into the boys' familial places, I learned about their lives outside of school; I learned about the boys' curriculum making in school and at home. Further, I paid attention to what emerged from the living on both landscapes and from the back and forth movement from one landscape to the other.

**Thinking about curriculum and curriculum making.** Earlier in my doctoral program, I was introduced to Clandinin and Connelly's (1992) notion of *curriculum making*; they suggested a view on curriculum:

an account of teachers' and children's lives together in schools and classrooms . . .  
a view in which the teacher is seen as an integral part of the curricular process . . .  
in which teacher, learners, subject matter, and milieu are in dynamic interaction.  
(p. 392)

I was instantly drawn to the idea that I could be a curriculum maker with my students, not just a person who delivers the mandated curriculum. The thought of co-composing lived curricula with children opened a new horizon for me to think about curriculum in schools. I learned new ways to talk about it; I spoke with words such as *lived curriculum*, *co-composing curriculum* with children, and *making curriculum*. My previous experiences in schools had not introduced me to that vocabulary and those

notions. When I shared my new view on curriculum and curriculum making with some of my teacher colleagues, they did not know what curriculum making meant, just as I did not before I took Jean Clandinin's course called *Curriculum Foundations and Inquiries*. More than four years have passed since I was introduced to the idea of making curriculum. Although I came to understand that from day one I made curriculum with my students, I did not think of what I did as curriculum making; I was perhaps delivering the curriculum. Naming what I did as curriculum making, a process in which I was an active agent, gave me a different perspective on the curriculum the children and I co-composed and offered me many possibilities for imagining teaching.

Thinking about the boys' familial curriculum making brought me to revisit the word *curriculum*. I returned to the definition I wrote previously, from Connelly and Clandinin's *Teachers as Curriculum Planners* (1988), who invited people to imagine that curriculum "can become one's life course of action . . . the paths we have followed and the paths we intend to follow" (p. 1). Reading that definition again brought discomfort in me. At the time I wrote this chapter, I was actively searching for a position for when I would complete my dissertation. I was considering returning to teach children and was imagining myself in the classroom with children. It surprised me to realize I could not think practically about my new understanding of curriculum and curriculum making in the context of teaching children. I could not imagine myself teaching students considering their lives and my life as the starting point while not privileging the mandated curriculum. When I tried to imagine curriculum making with future students, the mandated curriculum (or subject matter) seemed, once again, to take the central place; it still overshadowed the lives. I returned to Schwab's (1962) four commonplaces for

thinking about curriculum: the teacher, the learner, the milieu, and the subject matter. It helped me visualize the lives of teachers and learners, classrooms, schools, homes, communities, and the nested relationships; alongside those, the subject matter did not have a central position. Situating my inquiry into what is curriculum and curriculum making within Schwab's (1962) four commonplaces helped me see curriculum more practically, as a life course of action, with multiple pathways individuals have taken and plan to take. Curriculum making, then, had the possibility to become co-composed life stories rather than a pre-planned generic course of study transmitted to children and filled with specific predetermined content (a curriculum centred on subject matter). The gradual shift in my understanding of how curriculum and curriculum making could be understood otherwise frequently inspired me to try to retell my teacher stories and imagine reliving them within my curriculum, within the paths I intend to follow and those I have taken.

**Thinking about curriculum making in a familial place.** My research design afforded me to be in the homes of the boys and the mothers who participated in the study. The homes were a milieu where the boys lived with their families, one of Schwab's (1962) four commonplaces for thinking about curriculum. Thinking about the Robinsons' and the Johnsons' familial curriculum making, I wondered about learners and teachers. Who were the learners? Who were the teachers? In the context of their lives at home, I saw the parents and the children as both the learners and teachers. I know my children often teach me; they can be my teachers and I can be the learner. At other times, I am their teacher and they are learners. Marie learned from being alongside Matson that giving him time after school to relax and eat helped him be ready to read books. Morgan

learned, when Tiny Tim was tired, that she needed to offer him a variety of books if he were to practise reading that day. Tiny Tim learned from his father that he needed to pause after a period when he read. Matson learned from his mother how to read when “she read and [they] went”<sup>125</sup> (Transcript, Sonia & Matson, June 22, 2009), what Mrs. Taylor called copycat reading. Children and adults took turns learning from each other. In schools, teachers are usually storied as the ones who teach while the children are storied as learners. The school landscape does not tell a story of children as teachers. The hierarchy is, for the most part, unchanging; the teachers teach, the children learn. At the Johnson’s and Robinson’s homes, where parents attended to fewer children than teachers do in schools, the hierarchical positions were not always maintained; children taught their parents as well. These two commonplaces, teacher and learner, take on a slightly different meaning when examined at home rather than at school.

Subject matter, a commonplace in curriculum making, is usually mandated in schools. In its mandated form, it is not coordinated (Schwab, Westbury & Wilkof, 1978) with the other commonplaces, the particular of the teachers, the learners, and the milieus. Curriculum developers do not know the children and the teachers for whom they develop these curricula, nor their milieus; they are developed for a mass, in a nonspecific milieu called—the classroom; they are not for the particular. Teachers know certain aspects of their students’ lives; they know the school milieu and know themselves (the teachers). When they make curriculum with their students, they are in a position to attend to and coordinate the four commonplaces (Schwab et al., 1978). Historically though, subject

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<sup>125</sup> Matson explained to me how he read with his mother at home; she read first and they read together afterwards.

matter has occupied a central position in curriculum making in schools. The mandated subject matter typically remains at the centre which limits teachers trying to attend to the four commonplaces as suggested by Schwab et al. (1978).

Marie and Morgan often took account of the subject matter alongside the learners, the teachers, and the milieus in their home; they knew their children and their milieus. When they made curriculum in their homes, Marie and Morgan knew many of the commonplaces Schwab (1962) insisted we needed to consider when making curriculum. The mothers might not be experts with the subject matter but knowing the other three commonplaces gave them a considerable advantage in making curriculum with their children. In the homes of the Robinsons and the Johnsons, the subject matter was probably considered more like Schwab (1962) argued it should be considered, an equal in relation to the other commonplaces. I do not pretend to know what the mothers thought, but I imagine when they considered the subject matter of home reading and made curriculum with their sons and families, they accounted for the other three commonplaces, the milieu, the teacher, and the learner.

My purpose in thinking about familial curriculum making considering Schwab's (1962) four commonplaces was to look at children's and parents' experiences in their homes in a way that would help me understand and imagine how curriculum could be made on that landscape, just the same as I did when I wondered about curriculum making in school. Huber et al. (2011) suggested we "decentre the view of curriculum making occurring in schools and classrooms and make visible the other places and people with whom children are also involved in curriculum making" (p. 2). A child's curriculum (a life course of action: past journeys and envisioned future) is not composed exclusively in

schools; it is a life long journey happening in a variety of places alongside multiple individuals. Tiny Tim, Matson and their mothers will make curriculum over a long period of time; it “includes schooling but [it is] life-long and broader-reaching than schooling” (Pushor, 2010, p. 24). Schools are storied as where children are educated and where teachers, educators, and policy makers are privileged as curriculum makers (Huber et al., 2011). By exposing the familial curriculum making, I wish to show the intricacy in children’s co-composing of their curriculum which might help shift how curriculum is made in schools. In the next section, I look into Matson and Marie’s familial curriculum making in the context of the school-prescribed home reading program.

**Reading as a family.** Home reading programs are common in schools; many teachers include them in their language arts program in support of the development of reading skills and the love of reading. They usually are assigned and are included in the children’s homework. Both Mrs. Taylor and Mrs. Henry had a home reading program for their students. In Grade 1, Mrs. Taylor reminded Marie that Matson should be reading to her; Marie recalled how she *messed up* because she had been reading to her son and did not realize he should have been reading to her (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009). She noted that he “never had the urge to really try” (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009). That comment had me wonder if Marie chose to read to Matson because he did not offer to read. Did she think that was the right thing to do with him? Matson was happy his mother read to him, but in Grade 1, children were supposed to start reading on their own. That was why Mrs. Taylor alerted Marie when she noticed Matson was behind. Following Mrs. Taylor’s lead, Marie tried to make Matson read to her, but she found he gave up easily (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009). Even though Mrs.

Taylor carefully chose the level of books for her students, Matson did not seem to enjoy reading them. Mrs. Taylor tried to support Marie in helping him learn to read by giving her key words Matson could practise to help with fluency. Marie and her husband diligently worked with Matson to help him learn to read the key words. Marie seemed happy with her son's reading at the end of Grade 1 but remarked later in Grade 2 that she felt he never was comfortable reading books in Grade 1 and thought he *struggled* until the end of that year (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010).

The story of Matson's home reading in Grade 1 shows how the school curriculum making shaped the familial curriculum making Marie did with her son at the beginning of Grade 1. She read to him up until Mrs. Taylor told her Matson needed to read to her. Some might think Matson was lazy for letting his mother read to him rather than him read to her. I wonder how Martha George, the teacher in Goldstein's (1998) study, would interpret his choice. Although Martha did not always leave it up to the children to choose, she believed their choices informed her on where they were in terms of academic and personal development (Goldstein, 1998, p. 321). Marie might have interpreted Matson's choice to listen to her read as an indicator of where he was in his reading development.

Marie mentioned she *messed up* when she learned Matson should be reading to her. Even though I believe she thought he was not ready to read on his own, she accepted Mrs. Taylor's instructions and made Matson read to her; she privileged the school curriculum making over her familial curriculum making. I know Marie had a good relationship with Mrs. Taylor and respected her expertise. However, Marie recalled how difficult it was to make her son read; he would give up easily, felt frustrated, and did not

want to read (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, June 24, 2009). Was this really how Marie wanted to make curriculum at home with Matson? Did she question how she made curriculum with Matson after she was told her son was behind? Did she feel she did not properly support Matson in learning to read?

For home reading in Grade 2, Matson had to read books he chose during the weekly class visit to the school library. Marie found some of the library books Matson brought home too difficult for him; she mentioned they had long paragraphs (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). She talked about what Matson liked to read; he liked his father's *Mustang* magazine, the *Guinness World Book of Records* and the *Ripley's Believe It or Not* but needed help to read those (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, February 16, 2010). I believe Matson had difficulties finding library books he liked and could read. His sister Monica, who was in Grade 1, loved to come home every day to read her books to her mother (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). Marie was pleased and amused to see Monica so motivated. Matson, on the other hand, surprised her with his interest in reading Monica's books (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). She explained:

I'll sit down with [Monica] to do her book. He's like, "I [want to] read it". . . . I make her read it first and then he reads it, and he sees how fast he can read it now.

So, he's quite excited. (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009)

As I mentioned in Matson's Grade 2 narrative account (Chapter 10), Marie thought Matson wanted to show he could read better than his sister could (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). She was happy to see Matson more interested in reading now that he was in Grade 2, whereas in Grade 1, "he wouldn't even really try"; she believed



Matson felt like this because he could read better (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, October 14, 2009). The familial curriculum Marie made with her children allowed for each child to be a starting point (Huber et al., 2011). She listened to Monica who wanted to be heard reading and involved Matson who, according to her, wanted to show he could read better than his younger sister could. She did not discourage him from reading the easy books Monica brought home from Grade 1; she welcomed her son's eagerness to read them, even though he was in Grade 2.

Marie seemed comfortable making curriculum in the way she did with her children in the context of home reading. She saw her son read and be interested in reading. Marie assumed Matson did well in school from his report cards; she did not notice any struggle and did not receive alarming calls from his teacher. Matson told her one day that he was "a really good reader"; Marie was happy to know her son felt good about his reading skills (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010). The curriculum she made with her children allowed for Matson to be a mentor to his younger sister. When he watched television sitting next to her, he was available to help with words if she needed; he was her teacher. Marie's support for Matson's interest in reading Monica's books contributed to his positive self-image and increased confidence because he experienced success reading those books. Marie put Matson more in the centre of curriculum making. She was mindful of the subject matter, which in this case was home reading, and the milieu, a milieu that involved Monica who wanted to read to anyone in the house. As the teacher in this situation, she coordinated the commonplaces to suit her family; it suited Matson's reading level, it suited Monica's need for attention, and it suited her to see her son embrace reading and feel successful. Marie made what Huber

and al. (2011) called “responsive curriculum making that begins with the child’s . . . knowing, with [her] ongoing negotiation of her stories to live by” (p. 40). Marie’s curriculum making alongside her children was a response to, and was shaped by, her family’s needs (Huber et al., 2011, p. 41), needs that changed through time. Marie shaped the familial space in response to how Monica and Matson responded to the home reading program.

**Documenting home reading.** Although Marie did not write the titles of the books Matson read at home, she indicated that he read a lot (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, December 9, 2009). Mrs. Henry encouraged her students to write down the titles of the books they read on a reading sheet and asked them to bring the sheet back to school; she rewarded students who followed her instructions with small prizes. Marie did not think Matson was interested in the stickers he could earn when he returned a completed reading sheet (Transcript, Sonia & Marie, March 24, 2010). Neither Marie, nor Matson wrote down the titles of the books he read; Monica, on the other hand, did it consistently. Marie explained how it was easier with Monica because she had a book per night while Matson read whatever, whenever (Field notes, November 4, 2009). I assumed it meant more to Monica to document her reading than it did for Matson. Maybe Matson was not interested in the stickers his teacher gave them. I wondered, though; did he omit documenting his reading because writing down titles of Grade 1 books could have caused problems? Would Mrs. Henry have indicated to Marie that Matson was behind, as Mrs. Taylor did in Grade 1? Did Marie decide to keep that story secret from the teacher because she believed it would bump against her familial curriculum making in which she saw her son progress as a reader? Did she, consciously or unconsciously, keep her

familial curriculum making silent from the school? Did Matson forget and/or refuse to write down the titles because he knew he was reading *easy* books and wanted to keep that secret? Did he worry his teacher would not approve of his choices? Did he worry other students would laugh at him if they saw which books he read? Did he avoid documenting his reading so the story he co-composed with Monica and his mother around the books he read would be the one he could tell about his reading and about himself as a reader? What if Marie had decided to follow the guidelines Mrs. Henry suggested for the home reading program? What if she had insisted Matson read the more difficult library books? How would privileging the school curriculum making have shaped the storying of Matson as a reader? Would he be storied at a deficit?

**Marie's counterstory.** Marie noticed how Monica was catching up to Matson in reading. From our conversation, I did not sense she worried about Matson even though his younger sister could read almost as well as he did. She saw Matson for who he was, a progressing reader, and a boy who felt good about his accomplishment. She did what she believed would help Matson move forward. She compared her children's reading skills but did not seem to think they needed to be reading at specific predetermined levels. I believe she saw Matson's reading development on a continuum, the continuum to which Mrs. Taylor referred during our conversations. Through the familial curriculum making with her children, Marie composed a counterstory<sup>126</sup> to the dominant story of grade level of achievement; her story focussed on her children's progress and respected their individual development pace. Something motivated Marie to pursue the familial

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<sup>126</sup> Lindemann Nelson (1995) calls a counterstory, a story that disrupts the dominant one and helps bring shifts and changes (Clandinin et al., 2006).

curriculum making she did with Matson's home reading even though it did not follow the school curriculum making. What inspired her to live and compose such a home story, a story she shared with me, a story she did not silence in her living with Matson although it did not match the appropriate levels for Grade 2 books? When do parents make a familial curriculum that silences the curriculum making recommended by the schools, as Marie did in her house? What makes it happen? Would Marie be considered resistant if the school staff knew what she did with Matson? What about the parents who might believe in a familial curriculum making different from the one the schools suggest but hesitate to do so and let the school curriculum making shape the familial curriculum making? Do these parents feel unqualified to make such curricular decisions? Do they think teachers are the experts in making decisions regarding curriculum making? What if they understood the making of curriculum Schwab (1983) suggested where "each of the commonplaces should be given equal weight" (p. 241), and where the teachers (the parents in familial curriculum making) know the learners (the children) better than anyone else? How would parents negotiate schools' agendas in their homes if they positioned themselves as equals with the professionals (the teachers, the administrators, the policy-makers) and did not take on the role of the *protected*?

Inquiring into silences on school and home landscapes and into the familial curriculum making in Tiny Tim's and Matson's stories allowed me to broaden my understanding of the lived experiences of children, parents, and teachers in schools and at home. It helped me travel to their worlds (Lugones, 1987). The complexities of this multiperspectival narrative inquiry brought many tensions for me as I tried to live a

relational ethics with the participants. The tensions I experienced provided me with insights into making curriculum with children and families. It was worth it.

In the next chapter, I turn to what I have learned through this research and imagine myself moving forward as an educator and researcher.

## **Chapter Eleven: Learning from Multiple Perspectives**

As I looked across the boys' narrative accounts, I noticed threads running through their stories. In this chapter, I ponder on the learning this research provided me and imagine forward looking stories inspired by my learning from being alongside my participants.

I remember how busy my days were when I taught Grade 1 children in schools. I arrived early every morning to prepare material and organize the classroom to welcome the children. When the bell rang, boys and girls came in, settled in, and shared stories with me. We usually started the day with a conversation, gathered on a big carpet in the corner of the classroom. Following the early morning routine, we started to work on the activities I planned for the children. Trying to cover daily plans was always a challenge. Surprises, dramas, celebrations, and unexpected events often intertwined with the curriculum I planned for the students. Life in the classroom had a way of telling me there was more to it than the planned curriculum. I was often overwhelmed by the interruptions that slowed down the execution of my prepared activities. I frequently felt the need to reflect on what happened in the classroom, but the busy pace of the day did not allow me to do so. Recess supervision, phone calls to return, shoelaces to untangle, lost mittens to find; my days were filled with a succession of continuous tasks and undertakings. At the end of the afternoon, after the children had left, I sat at my desk, sorted papers accumulated during the day, and in the tranquillity of the classroom, feeling exhausted, I planned for the next day. I realize now in looking back that the children and

I co-composed the lived curriculum. I had many wonders about what we did in class but did not generally have the time to slow down and really inquire into what was happening.

Attending graduate school to pursue doctoral studies was a pleasure for me. Graduate school gave me time to think. I appreciated being able to slow down and reflect on teaching, learning, and living. Additionally, I was aware I was privileged to engage in research in a school where I observed children and teachers co-composing curriculum alongside me. I could study teaching, learning, and living. Studying the experiences of children, parents, and teacher's experiences in school, regularly reminded me of my personal lived experiences from previous teaching years. My position as a researcher gave me the opportunity to reflect on my teaching practices. As I near the end of my doctoral journey and prepare to move on to other endeavours, I look back at what I have learned about the children's, parents', and teachers' experiences as it relates to the struggle to learn to read and their lives in and out of school.

### **Revisiting a Research Puzzle**

My research puzzle focused on the experiences of children who struggled to learn to read in Grade 1, their parents' experiences living alongside their children, and the experiences of the teachers who accompanied them at school. My hope was to learn from these three groups of people about their experiences living in the midst of the tensions created between the lived curriculum of a struggling reader and the expectations of the mandated curriculum and of our institutional and sociocultural narratives. With Mrs. Taylor's help in Grade 1, we chose Tiny Tim and Matson to be participants because they struggled to learn to read. I came alongside them, their parents, Mrs. Taylor in Grade 1,

and Mrs. Henry in Grade 2. During the time I spent with the participants, I did not exclusively focus on reading or on the struggle with learning to read. I paid attention to each life, as a whole. I tried to attend to what mattered to the participants. A teacher friend asked me if I found the reasons that explained why the boys could not read; I pointed out I did not look for that. I indicated I studied the participants' experiences in the context of struggling to learn to read. Once more, I realized how confusing my research topic could be for people. The tendency to find solutions to what we perceive as deficient or lacking is common in education and educational research. Deficiencies are felt when there are standards by which people are judged. I imagine children, as the two boys in my study, who feel a struggle when trying to learn to read in Grade 1 do so partly because of the expectation that Grade 1 students will learn to read in Grade 1 and no later. That learning outcome is a social and institutional construction. Over time, someone or a group of people decided that children in Grade 1 could, should, or would learn to read; learning to read in Grade 1 has become a deeply rooted expectation and a learning outcome in Grade 1 (Alberta Education, 2000). The impact such an expectation had on my daughter, my family, numerous children, and families is what inspired me to inquire into the boys' experiences. My purpose in studying their experiences was not to find a way to *fix* the children or to help them learn to read in Grade 1. I do not believe all children should, can, will, or desire to learn to read in Grade 1. My purpose for this study was not to find ways to help children better reach the benchmarks our society has established for them. Rather, I wanted to highlight how those benchmarks shape people's lives. I wish for children to have educative experiences at school and at home, and I hope my research will help teachers, administrators, parents, teacher educators, and policy



makers help children have educative experiences. What I learned in this study does not exclusively relate to people's experiences around the struggle to learn to read but relates to people's lives as a whole, in and out of school.

## **Learning from Silent Stories**

I believe participants shared stories with me they would not have shared outside of the contexts of our relationships. I learned from being alongside the two boys, their mothers, and the two teachers that there were many silent stories. Some stories were kept silent while children and mothers travelled back and forth between home and school landscapes. More stories were kept silent; stories involving the children with their teachers; stories involving the mothers and the teachers; and stories involving the teachers with the mothers and their children.

I inquired into Morgan's silent story of Tiny Tim who was scared to talk to his teacher, Mrs. Henry. That story reminded me of Lola's parents who told me many years ago how their daughter was scared of me. Morgan had reminded her son to talk to Mrs. Henry if he needed help from her but Tiny Tim did not think he could do that; Morgan told me she believed Tiny Tim was scared to talk to his teacher. She did not tell Mrs. Henry her son felt scared; she kept it silent. I wondered if Morgan felt uncomfortable or unable to tell Mrs. Henry, or if she assumed telling her story would not help matters.

Another silence to which I attended was Mrs. Taylor's assessment story of Tiny Tim's reading. The assessment story she told Morgan and wrote on the report card did not match the assessment story she shared with me. Looking at the different assessment stories Mrs. Taylor told, I understood she might have covered over Tiny Tim's reading

assessment in order to follow school policies. I suggested that the school and the school district's story of assessing with benchmarks silenced Mrs. Taylor's story of learning to read, a process evolving on a continuum.

There were several other silences I will unpack and try to understand later. For example, both boys had worries and fears they kept silent from the teachers. Matson worried he might fail Grade 1. Tiny Tim did not turn around to look at the words on the back wall because he thought he was not allowed to do that. He did not want any trouble with his teacher. Both boys shared with me they did not like to read but never told their teachers. The mothers expressed frustrations, felt confused, and told me stories their children shared with them. They did not always share everything with the teachers. Morgan and Tiny Tim were frustrated with the accounting of books he read for the home reading program. Marie found challenging the management of her children's homework and home reading. Teachers also kept stories silent. Both Mrs. Taylor and Mrs. Henry did not indicate on the report cards that the boys had not improved as they hoped they would. Mrs. Henry did not tell Morgan that she was surprised Tiny Tim did not do better in his test. I believe some of these silent stories need to be told, for the well-being of the students. I do not know if all silent stories should be told but inquiring into the silences is important in understanding children's, parents', and teachers' lived experiences. Insights from these inquiries could contribute to making children's learning experiences more educative (Dewey, 1938).

## **Learning from Attending to Familial Curriculum Making**

Spending time alongside the children and their mothers and going into their homes allowed me to learn about their familial curriculum making. I highlighted Marie and Matson's familial curriculum making in the context of home reading. Inquiring into their experiences over time and remembering lived experiences in Grade 1 when Matson was storied as being *really behind in reading*, I came to understand Marie's curriculum making with her children as a counterstory to the dominant story of reading in schools. She made curriculum with Matson in response to his motivation in reading his sister's Grade 1 books. She welcomed his interest in reading Monica's books even though they were not at the Grade 2 level. In the making of their familial curriculum, Marie and Matson kept a story secret. They did not fill out the reading sheet Mrs. Henry provided her students for the home reading program; that allowed Marie and Matson to construct a positive story of Matson as a reader. I believe Marie, a knower of her son and of the specific commonplaces of their familial curriculum making, assessed Matson's reading and his dispositions to read and made curriculum with him and his sister in ways that were educative, that would encourage the growth of further experiences (Dewey 1938). Silences pervaded this study. The story Marie and Matson kept secret in making familial curriculum in response to the requirements of the home reading program shed light on another silence that lived in the negotiation of school and familial curriculum making.

## **About Silences, Truth, and the Composition of Lives**

Although my early understanding of curriculum as planned by the teacher and directed by the mandated curriculum had not taken familial curriculum making into

consideration, families have always made curriculum in their homes. This idea had not been part of the discourse during my teacher education and subsequent professional development, and I only started to address it as Huber et al. (2011) recently introduced it in educational research (Huber et al., 2011). Though there was a secret story in Marie's familial curriculum making, families do not always keep their familial curriculum making secret; rather, it often remains unknown as it is generally unattended to by teachers and school administrators. Children travel between two curriculum-making landscapes or curriculum-making worlds<sup>127</sup> (Huber et al., 2011): the home and the school. In the frequent transitions between the two landscapes, silences and gaps are constructed by children, parents, and teachers. There were silences in Loyla's story, a girl in Huber et al.'s (2011) study, whose school curriculum making in her Kindergarten class involved ranking each child's snacks. In Loyla's travel between her school and home curriculum-making worlds, she tried to understand which snacks were healthy enough to earn her the five points her teacher awarded for healthy snacks. Confused and frustrated, her mother, Orie, explained to Loyla how food could be viewed as healthy by some people and unhealthy by others. She tried to help Loyla understand the complexity of giving rankings to food and suggested Loyla tell her teacher she did not want to participate in the snack activity. Orie soon realized she put her young daughter in an uncomfortable

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<sup>127</sup> By *world*, Huber et al. (2011) resonated with Lugones' (1987) understanding that a *world* is "a construction of a tiny portion of a particular society" (p. 10); it is not necessarily "a construction of a whole society" (p. 10). Huber et al. (2011) saw the children's curriculum-making worlds as not only "shaped by differing physical places but also by differing ways of being and interacting and, therefore, of knowing and knowledge" (p. 108). Huber et al. (2011) attended to the *travel* (Lugones, 1987) children needed to do between their two curriculum-making worlds, and how they were *world-travellers*. Lugones (1987) wrote that "those of us who are 'world'-travellers have the distinct experience of being different in different worlds and of having the capacity to remember other worlds and ourselves in them" (p. 11). I have come to understand curriculum-making worlds to be more than physical places; they are places "filled with multiple and often conflicting constructions of [selves]" (Huber et al., 2011, p. 110).

position as Loyla did not want to get in trouble with her teacher. Instead, she told Loyla she:

knew it was hard for her to say all of this to her teacher and that maybe what [they] were learning was that to be safe in school, to not feel judged, people just needed to lie. As [she] hugged Loyla [she] told her that at home [they] would not need to pretend this judging of food, and people, was okay. (Huber et al., 2011, p. 107).

Orie did not want to tell Loyla's teacher how she felt about ranking food because it made Loyla uncomfortable; instead, she told Loyla they might need to lie about it. As I read about Orie's suggestion to lie so Loyla may stay safe in school, I remembered Rich's (1979) writing: "Lies are usually attempts in making things simpler" (p. 188). When composing familial curriculum with Loyla, Orie recognized that sometimes, in order to get by in school and make things simpler, Loyla might have to pretend "to be someone other than who she is" (Huber et al., 2011, p. 107). Orie's suggestion to lie by pretending to be someone other than they were implied telling cover stories, therefore, keeping some stories silent. By keeping silent her discomfort about ranking snacks from Loyla's teacher, Orie covered her story, which in a sense, could be interpreted as a lie.

Silences in Orie and Loyla's school snack ranking story and in Marie and Matson's home reading story show the chasm that exists between the two curriculum-making worlds in which children live. Huber et al. (2011) pointed to the tensions children and parents live when children travel between the two worlds. In response to such tensions, people sometimes choose to silence their stories. The tensions Marie experienced with Matson's reading in Grade 1 might have prompted her to silence the

home reading story in Grade 2 so her son would not be labelled as *behind in reading* and would not have to read books he did not want to read. Perhaps she was trying to make things simpler. In Marie's familial curriculum making, it might have been simpler, indeed, to keep the story secret. However, Morgan's silent story of Tiny Tim's fear of talking to his teacher did not make things simpler. Tiny Tim was a student who did not feel comfortable talking to his teacher. His school curriculum making was not made simpler by keeping his story silent. Morgan did not share this silent story with Mrs. Henry because it was difficult for her to tell such a story, just as it was difficult for Orie to share the tensions she felt about snack ranking with Loyla's teacher. Rich's (1979) words help me appreciate how important it is to understand the particularities of context when trying to make sense of the way parents, teachers and students communicate with each other. "Truthfulness anywhere means a heightened complexity. But it is a movement into evolution" (Rich, 1979, p. 193). When Marie, Morgan, and Orie tried to keep things simpler, they avoided the heightened complexity that would have come with telling their stories. Mrs. Taylor possibly did the same with Tiny Tim's assessment story. Telling her story of learning to read as being on a continuum and a coherent assessment story might have been too complex; telling a cover story perhaps made things simpler.

### **On Sharing Stories**

In this study, children had the opportunity to tell stories of school; stories of how they experienced co-composing curriculum in school with their teachers and with their friends; and stories of who they were and what they did in school. They also had the opportunity to tell stories of their lives outside of school. Similarly, parents shared

stories of school; stories of their children in school; stories of them in relation to their children; stories of their families; and stories of them in relation to the school, the teachers, or the school administrators. While I was in the classrooms, I regularly heard teachers share stories of school as well. They told stories of co-composing curriculum with the children; stories of children, of parents, and of families; stories of teachers and administrators; and stories about themselves and their families. Beside the participants, I told stories as well; stories of Annie; stories of teaching and learning; stories of me as a teacher; and stories about my family. Furthermore, children, parents, and teachers told school stories of Ramsey Elementary School.

My time spent alongside the participants and the relational quality of the inquiry led to telling and sharing various stories, stories that might not have been told outside of the relationships or over a shorter period of time. We, the participants and I, had the opportunity to co-construct meaning about our lives as we lived, told, and retold our stories. The sharing of these stories contributed to sharing knowledge of people's lives and experiences. In the context of this study, the knowledge shared highlighted participants' experiences of school curriculum making, of familial curriculum making, and of the travels between the two worlds of school and home curriculum making. These shared stories, once out in the world (King, 2003), can shape the lives of those who told them as well as those who receive them. The shared knowledge in telling and hearing stories requires people to negotiate new meanings about their lives. By telling their stories, Matson and Tiny Tim made sense of their lives in school and at home. Their parents also made sense of their experiences alongside their sons in sharing stories with me and recounting stories their sons told them.

I do not believe Marie or Morgan would have shared as many stories about their sons as they did, had I not been in relationships with them. I do not think Matson would have told Mrs. Taylor he worried he might fail Grade 1, nor do I believe Tiny Tim would have told Mrs. Henry he was scared to speak to her. It would have been too difficult for them to address these issues with their teachers. Their mothers did not share these stories with the teachers either although they were aware I might share them in the narrative accounts. We know the boys' stories because the relational inquiry in which the participants and I engaged made possible sharing intimate stories. In addition, the relational ethics of the inquiry and its focus on relationships helped the negotiation of difficult stories participants shared, particularly those about the teachers.

The stories the participants in this study told will contribute to providing insights into children's, parents', and teachers' experiences in school. I believe their stories will shape how people understand experiences in schools. As the number of shared stories increases, changes in schools will become more critical. Stories of schools are not always positive, and tensions often develop within the space of these stories. Schools are tension-filled places. This study showed the tensions the children, the mothers, and the teachers experienced as they co-composed curriculum at school and at home. The silent stories I shared were silenced because of tensions experienced by children, parents, or teachers. Situations that create tensions in children's, parents', and teachers' lives might go unnoticed if unshared. Identifying and understanding sources of tension in people's lives can be challenging. Teachers, for example, might be unaware of the existence of tensions in children's lives in schools. Mrs. Taylor did not know Matson worried he might fail; she was unaware of that before I shared the story with her. Mrs. Henry was



not aware Morgan felt brushed off by her. Morgan kept that story silent from her. This multiperspectival study provided a space for sharing stories and contributed to awakening participants to each other's lived experiences. Although it was difficult to share some stories with participants, it shed light on tension-filled experiences that were mis-educative (Dewey, 1938) for the children.

## **Learning from Tensions**

Inquiring narratively helped me learn to understand and view tensions differently. Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, and Murray Orr (2009) explained the shift they experienced in attending to tensions in their study:

As we thought about tensions, our understanding of the meaning of tensions began to shift and change. For many teachers, and indeed for many people, tensions are thought to have a negative valence, that is, tensions are something to be avoided or smoothed over. . . . Gradually, we began to understand tensions in a more relational way, that is, tensions that live between people, events, or things, and are a way of creating a between space, a space which can exist in educative ways. (p. 82)

Attending to tensions lived by the participants in this study, tensions represented through silences, helped understand the complexity involved in children's, parents', and teachers' lives and provided a space for inquiry.

## **Imagining Forward Looking Stories**

The knowledge I constructed in collaboration with the research participants and the insights I gained from the study will shape how I will make curriculum in the future.

In the following pages, I share forward-looking stories (Lindemann Nelson, 1999; Clandinin et al., 2006) or retellings that I imagined from learning alongside the participants of this study.

**Stories for a schoolteacher.** Being in relation with Marie and Morgan, I came to understand how they were knowers of their sons. Morgan knew Tiny Tim kept some stories silent at schools because he did not want to cry in front of his friends; she knew he strategically chose books and the reasons for doing that. Morgan knew Tiny Tim thought he could not turn around when he sat at his desk and that he was scared to talk to his teacher. She knew he liked to play outside, once spring had arrived. Marie was also a knower of her son. She knew Matson did not want to read books in Grade 1, and how he worried he might fail because he thought he did not do *good*. She knew he felt good about his schoolwork in Grade 2 and could tell he liked to show how much better he could read than his sister could. Marie knew Matson loved spending time at the creek by their house and riding his bike with neighbours. Parents are knowers of their children as children are knowers of who they are and of their lives. I, as teacher, need to remember that when I make curriculum.

When I imagine myself returning to teach children in schools, I wish for opportunities to relive many retold stories. In this section, I will share two of these retellings. The first retelling is about attending to the relational aspect of making curriculum in schools alongside children, their parents, and their families. The second retelling points to the understanding that, as teachers make curriculum in schools with children and families, they need to awaken to another curriculum children and families make— the familial curriculum.

Imagining making curriculum in school attending to relationships with children and parents, I hear parents telling me what they think I ought to know to better support their children's education and well-being. I think Mrs. Taylor would have liked to know that Matson worried he might fail Grade 1; she would have probably made responsive curriculum with him (Huber et al., 2011) by attending to Matson's assessment making and identity making (Huber et al., 2011). I believe Mrs Taylor would have tried to help make his lived experiences in school more educative (Dewey, 1938). Developing relationships with parents, I believe, would make space for them to share stories about their children, their families, and about themselves. Having been engaged in research with participants taught me the value of relationships in coming to know someone, in making meaning together, and in negotiating tensions as we co-composed curriculum in the midst of our lives.

As I think back about the significant activities in a school year, Meet the Teacher Night, report cards, conferences, and celebrations, I try to imagine how I could help make these school events more inclusive and relational with families. I am reminded of Pushor's (2001) work about parents' positioning and the landscapes of school. In a conversation with Evelyn, a school principal, Pushor asked how important small gestures were in welcoming families in schools; Evelyn responded by saying "The little things are important" (Pushor, 2001, p. 108). Pushor (2001) recognized then, that it was not the small things themselves that were important but what they represented. The small gestures Evelyn made to parents, students, and their siblings such as offering coffee and giving all children (including siblings) an Easter pencil represented her intentions in welcoming them all into the school and in developing relationships with them. Attending

to *little things* “brings us in close contact with details and particularities” (Greene, 1995, p. 10), Greene’s (1995) notion of seeing big. When as a teacher I see big, I welcome “students’ family life in its ease and unease. . . . [I become] conscious of the dramas played out on the playgrounds and front stoops, in the hospital, . . . in nearby parks, libraries” (Greene, 1995, p. 11—12) and of the happy events and the celebrations. In attending to little things, just as Evelyn did with her students and their families, care for each other emerges and relationships develop.

Returning to significant activities of a school year, I imagine myself welcoming parents and children at Meet the Teacher Night in a friendly ambience, inviting them to join their child’s new classroom community and to develop friendships. I imagine sharing snacks and beverages, hoping children and their parents feel welcomed in the classroom. It is in welcoming the children and the parents that I hope they would learn to trust me and develop relationships with me. Following the initial contact with the families, I imagine myself visiting children outside of school, in their homes, at soccer games, at swimming lessons, or music recitals. I believe it would help develop relationships with students and their parents.

Greene’s (1995) “educational reality seen large” (p. 12) which includes students’ lives in and out of school resonates with Huber et al.’s (2011) conceptualization of familial curriculum making. In an effort to retell stories of school curriculum making with children and their parents, I imagine teaching children in schools will include becoming aware of their familial curriculum making. In my attempts to relive these retold stories of understanding children’s familial curriculum making, I will be grateful for the relationships developed with them and their parents. Information families will

share with me about their familial curriculum making will, I hope, help make curriculum in schools and offer meaningful and educative experiences to children in my classes. If it as at all possible, I imagine families opening their homes for me so I can visit them and become familiar with their lives outside of school. Prospects of visiting children in various contexts would provide insights into their lives and reveal possible tensions in curriculum making. Relationships developed with children and their parents would help negotiate new understandings of co-composing curriculum. Spaces created by attending to familial curriculum making might inspire children and parents to tell stories that otherwise would remain silent. Parents might feel comfortable sharing with me, for example, their child's fears, or how they find home reading too challenging and unsuited for their child or their family's lifestyle. I would hope that in co-composing curriculum with children and parents, parents "will see the incredible value of . . . their familial curriculum making in the life writing of their children and themselves" (Huber et al., 2011, p. 148). Maybe then, they would tell their silenced stories and help live counterstories by not keeping stories silent, as Marie and Matson did about home reading. Recognizing parents and children as knowers will help me shift how I make and live curriculum in schools.

As I imagine these new ways of living my stories as a teacher, I know it will not be simple. Attending to the multiple and complex lives of students and parents will require energy, imagination, care, patience, love (Goldstein, 1997), resources, time, hope, understanding, and *world-travelling* with loving perception<sup>128</sup> (Lugones, 1987).

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<sup>128</sup> Lugones (1987) introduced the notion of world-travelling as a way to "understand what it is to be [someone else]" (p. 17), and to see the world from a different viewpoint. Within the concept of world-

Although the challenge will be considerable, the learning I made alongside research participants inspires me to try reliving my stories of making curriculum within which lives are central. I look forward to negotiating new stories of teaching children.

**Stories for a teacher educator.** Recalling my experiences of teaching pre-service teachers in the Education Department at Campus Saint-Jean, I remember feeling strongly about exploring, with the pre-service teachers, a pedagogy of inquiring into our lives and our personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). I did not always feel the pre-service teachers understood my intentions and the value I saw in their lived experiences, and what could be learned from inquiring into them. Occasionally, a bright-eyed pre-service teacher seemed to understand the pedagogy I hoped would eventually become an integral part of how I storied myself as a teacher educator. However, I came to understand that many pre-service teachers expected to receive the knowledge that is regularly prescribed in teacher education, the knowledge Connelly and Clandinin (2000) referred to as “knowledge for teachers”. Clandinin (2009) explained:

Knowledge for teachers gets at possessions, things that teachers can acquire and know . . . This is a view of knowledge in which teachers are seen to be part of a conduit through which theoretical knowledge is applied to practice. In this view of knowledge, knowledge needs continual updating, is seen as a commodity, and is something that can be packaged and given to teachers through training or

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travel, Lugones discussed notions of arrogant and loving perception she borrowed from Frye (1983). She explained arrogant perception as a failure to travel to someone else’s world or to see from their point of view. Loving perception, on the other hand, enables us to identify with others and understands ‘what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes’ (Lugones, 1987, p. 17).

practice sessions. It is also seen as something that can be applied directly, and in relatively standardized ways, in classroom practice. (p. 7)

In the *knowledge for teachers* paradigm, I struggled to maintain narrative coherence<sup>129</sup> (Carr, 1986). I often wonder at the tensions I experienced in making curriculum with pre-service teachers. By sharing with pre-service teachers the stories my participants and I co-composed during my study, I hope to awaken them to the need to inquire into their personal experiences and their narrative knowledge<sup>130</sup> Clandinin (2009) referred to as “their personal practical knowledge, composed and recomposed over time and in the contexts of personal and professional knowledge landscapes” (p. 7). Perhaps pre-service teachers will learn to differentiate knowledge for teachers from teacher knowledge (Clandinin, 2009) and understand the value in both.

When I imagine myself returning to teach in a teacher education program, I imagine sharing stories of Marie, Matson, Morgan, Tiny Tim, Mrs. Taylor, and Mrs. Henry. As well, I would share stories numerous narrative inquirers co-composed with their participants when they studied people’s experiences in and out of schools (Chung, 2008; Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin et al., 2006; Desrochers, 2006; Huber et al., 2011; Kim, 2011; Mitton, 2008; Murphy & Pushor, 2004; Murphy, 2004; Murray Orr, 2005; Pearce, 2005; Pushor, 2001; Pushor & Murphy 2010). In sharing and inquiring into stories of children, parents, and families my intentions would be to awaken pre-service teachers to the lived experiences of children, parents, and teachers in schools, show how complex

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<sup>129</sup> Carr described narrative coherence as a process of “telling and retelling, to ourselves and to others, the story of what we are about and what we are” (1986, p. 97). He pointed out that there is a constant struggle to maintain or achieve narrative coherence in the midst of the unfolding of our active and chaotic lives (Carr, 1986, p. 91).

<sup>130</sup> Clandinin (2009) described teacher knowledge as narrative knowledge.

their lives are, and understand the ways in which these complex lives unfold in schools. Their appreciation of people's complex lives, perhaps, will help them understand the limits in focusing only on knowledge for teachers. Maybe pre-service teachers would awaken to their teacher knowledge and be inspired to inquire into it alongside colleagues and co-compose new understandings of what it means to be a teacher and of what teachers do.

Through the stories to which the pre-service teachers and I would attend, familial curriculum making would be highlighted. I would invite pre-service teachers to consider the different curriculum-making worlds in children's lives and to see school curriculum making as representing only one of the worlds into which curriculum is made. Perhaps they would come to understand that children and parents experience "curriculum-rich lives in their families and diverse community settings [which would mean] understanding curriculum making beyond the school" (Huber et al., 2011, p. 150). I would invite pre-service teachers to pay attention to tensions they might have experienced as they travelled between their various curriculum-making worlds as children or as pre-service teachers in their teacher education program. I could show how Matson and Marie's secret home reading story is an example of a tension that can be experienced when children and parents travel between curriculum-making worlds. Perhaps pre-service teachers will shift how they construct meaning around stories of schools. Maybe the dominant stories which:

assimilat[e] families into a curriculum that may not be attentive to the child's living . . . [would be confronted and would make space for] an understanding of



children and youth as shaped by both familial and school curriculum making, as people in the process of composing stories to live by. (Huber et al., 2011, p. 151)

Stories of children's and parents' lived experiences in and out of schools might show pre-service teachers how everyone involved in co-composing curricula of lives are "holders and makers of knowledge" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 1) alongside teachers, who often are storied as the knowers in schools. Recognizing parents and children as knowers and creating spaces in which relationships may develop, pre-service teachers might aspire to imagine curriculum making in schools in ways that would recognize children's various curriculum-making worlds.

**Stories for a researcher.** Imagining forward-looking stories of research brings many thoughts to my mind. The silences that permeated my study could all be sources of further inquiries. In addition, the quality of insights this multiperspectival inquiry provided and the representations of people's lived experiences through participants' tellings, over time and across places and relationships, would inspire me to pursue more inquiries alongside children, parents, and teachers. I imagine I could use a similar research design that would see me join participants' lives in the midst and in various school and familial contexts. These studies would provide more stories of lived experiences in curriculum making of lives. They would inform educational research and could lead to "narratives composed to shift the taken-for-granted institutional narrative" (Clandinin, 2009, p. 10); perhaps these would become lived counterstories (Lindemann Nelson, 1995).

Thinking back about the multiperspectival study I just completed, I wonder if I could, in a similar study, include an extra step in the design. After negotiating the

narrative accounts with the participants, I would engage in follow up conversations with the parents and the teachers and inquire, as a group, into moments of tensions we would select. I imagine it would be helpful for teachers and parents for composing forward-looking stories of being alongside the children. I understand that tensions might make the conversations difficult, but I believe such inquiries would be worth it.

## **Last Thoughts**

It is hard to believe this doctoral journey is coming to an end. Through the telling and retelling of the participants' stories, I found spaces to tell Annie's stories, those of a young girl who experienced challenging identity making stories (Huber et al., 2011) in school. Laying my stories and those of Annie's next to the participants' stories helped me retell stories of Annie's struggle with learning to read and stories of me, her mother, who believed that at one point in time, I harmed my child by sending her to school. Annie has grown; she loves to read. She is a happy and active teenage girl. Stories of school in which expectations to learn at predetermined paces still interrupt the stories Annie tells of herself. Those stories of school continue to trouble me.

I will carry with me the gifts Mrs. Taylor, Mrs. Henry, Morgan, Marie, Tiny Tim and Matson gave me, that is, the sharing of a part of their lives, forever. I know I will continue to learn from them and am aware they have already helped me retell stories of Annie, stories of teaching, and stories of schools.

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## Appendix A

### On Reading

In my experience, it is very difficult to be successful in school if one cannot read. As early as Grade 1, for example, children are asked to read words on worksheets. If they fail to do so, they will not be able to complete the worksheet unless they receive assistance from the teacher or from a classmate. In some situations, it is not allowed to ask for help. Children then fail to do the prescribed task unless they find a way to retrieve information that will enable them to respond appropriately. In later grades, being unable to read becomes very troublesome and impactful. It can shape the experiences children live as students. The Ministère de l'éducation du Québec (1991) reported that 49.6% of school dropouts repeated Grade 1. One common reason for repeating Grade 1 is the inability to read (May & Campbell, 1981). Since reading the information on school dropouts, I have been wondering if leaving school early could be related to unsuccessful reading experiences in Grade 1. The reading context of my inquiry brought me to look at the research on reading.

**Research on reading.** Over the last 50 years, there has been extensive research on reading. Alexander & Fox (2008) helped me understand the influence of past research on the lives of current schoolchildren and on the mandated curriculum. The authors' overview of the work done in the U.S. outlines five different eras of research on reading:

1. The era of conditioned learning (1950–1965)
2. The era of natural learning (1966–1975)
3. The era of information processing (1976–1985)

4. The era of sociocultural learning (1986–1995)
5. The era of engaged learning (1995– present).

It is important to note two things. First, these eras are research eras. What was happening in the schools at the time of each era was not necessarily representative of these research eras. Second, the transition from one era to another happened as one era blurred into a new one. In this chapter, I will briefly expose the five eras and will inquire into them using the four curriculum commonplaces (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988) to see possible consequences they have on the lived curriculum of struggling readers in schools.

The post-war research *era of conditioned learning* (1950–1965) saw the number of students in U.S. schools increase; as a result, the number of students having difficulties learning to read increased as well. This caught the attention of the population who wanted the *problem* fixed if the U.S. were to be competitive on the global scene. The launching of Sputnik surprised Americans and made them nervous about their aptitude to innovate. They believed a well-educated new generation would keep them ahead in terms of global competition. Reading was a basic element of a *good* education. Skinner’s behaviourist perspective became popular with its scientific approach to reading problems. It also suited the ideology of the research community of the time. Out of this era came “a body of literature on the multitude of sub skills required for reading” (Alexander & Fox, 2008, p. 36). Learning to read was assumed to be done through controlled and repeated actions in a specific environment.

Considering the four curriculum commonplaces, the era of conditioned learning saw the teacher as a technician, someone who followed the prescribed treatment that would help students learn in an orderly manner. The subject matter was the starting point



in this era. The milieu was perceived to be *controllable* and directly related to students' learning outcomes. I wonder about a child's lived curriculum in this era. I imagined a student might have felt pressured to learn in a specific way the skills identified for his/her age group. Reflecting on the characteristics of this era, I wondered about the lived curriculum for children who did not learn to read.

Work in neurology and artificial intelligence shifted researchers' attention away from the controlled environment of the behavioural approach to the mind of the learner. The research *era of natural learning* (1966–1975) saw Chomsky (1957) and other linguists argue that human beings were biologically programmed to learn languages. Psycholinguists like Goodman (1965) and Smith (1973) understood human's innate capacity to learn languages and assumed that reading and writing followed the same principle. The focus on meaning during this particular era brought other linguists, including Labov (1966), to inquire into “the interaction of language as a system and language in its particular social uses” (Alexander & Fox, 2008, p. 39). This led to research in the new field of sociolinguistics.

In this era in the classrooms, teachers' focus moved from the observation of displayed behaviours to the learners' learning features. Teachers' mandate was to set up learning contexts that would take in consideration the students' social uses of language. Students, I imagined, were still expected to learn with directed instruction, but the lens used to consider learning included a more real life context than in the previous era. The subject matter was still an important element in curriculum making and, indeed, was more studied and dissected. Reading and writing as subject matter was perceived as part of a complex language system. There was a new emphasis on the importance of the

milieu and on creating a language rich environment. This allowed children to work in more realistic life situations.

As more dollars were put into reading research in the U.S., more researchers, especially from cognitive psychology and information processing, became involved in projects. This was the *era of research in information processing* (1976–1985), an era that moved away from the natural language approach of the previous period and focused on the individual construction of knowledge. Alexander & Fox (2008) summarized the work in the following: “The research activities of this period demonstrated that students’ knowledge could be significantly modified through direct intervention, training, or explicit instruction” (p. 43). There was limited concern about the influence of the sociocultural context.

During this era, the teacher was perceived more or less similarly as he/she was in the conditioned era. The mandated curriculum became more detailed and specific and teachers had to teach considering those changes. Students, I imagined, were expected to learn according to the mandated curriculum, and if they did not, there was a new language in place that had been developed to name their *deficits*. Subject matter was again at the centre of curriculum making while the emphasis of the milieu seemed to disappear into the background. The lived curriculum of a child in school was influenced by the focus on the learner’s mind, the capacity to learn, or not, and what a learner was expected to learn depending on his/her age. Labels started to appear in educators’ vocabulary and started to affect the life of children and parents. I wondered about children’s lived curriculum in this era. I imagined they might have felt directed and controlled. I wonder what happened to the children who did not learn. Did they

experience labelling as pathologizing? How did parents react to the labels teachers and psychologists assigned?

The results from the information-processing era did not materialize as anticipated. Cognitive psychology became less popular, and the research *era of sociocultural learning* (1986–1995) began.

The works of Vygotsky (1934/1986), Lave (1988), and others (Heath, 1983; Rogoff, 1990) provided a new viewpoint for literacy researchers . . . These writings sparked a growing acceptance in the literacy community of the ethnographic and qualitative modes of inquiry. (Alexander & Fox, 2008, p. 46). The scientific model in research lost ground. Different theoretical movements appeared and included, among others, critical theory and postmodernism. Research began to be done differently. Learning was now perceived as a sociocultural activity that involved members of a learning community, a notion connected to the previous era of natural learning.

Even though the focus had moved away from cognitive psychology, the latter still informed the educational field. The new interest on sociocultural theories added an element for teachers to consider while making curriculum. Learners were studied from within a sociocultural frame but were still expected to learn the basics from the mandated curriculum. The subject matter remained a significant part of teaching and learning while the milieu received substantial attention as far as social and cultural considerations were involved. I imagined each child's lived curriculum resembled one from the former era. I imagined students were still expected to learn according to the mandated curriculum even though adjustments were made to accommodate various sociocultural groups.

Consequently, one more category was added in the labelling of students. I wondered if children still felt pressured to learn as prescribed, only in this era, more variables were considered, resulting in more ways to label struggling learners.

The last and current era, the research *era of engaged learning* (1996– present), brought attention to learners' interests and motivation. It is now recognized that students learn from different forms of texts in this age of multiliteracy (Pahl & Roswell, 2005). Reading is a multidimensional activity.

While the learner still resides and operates within a sociocultural context, attention again is turned to the individual working to create a personally meaningful and socially valuable body of knowledge. Thus the portrait of the engaged reader framed by the research has both individualistic and collective dimensions. (Alexander & Fox, 2008, p. 52–53)

Interestingly, the present era draws forward all the previous eras as they all blend, in different degrees, into how research is done today. The current era encourages teachers to use a vast repertoire of resources, including new technologies. Teachers are expected to consider learners' interests. Learners have access to a bigger selection of learning material but are still expected to follow the mandated curriculum. Subject matter continues to define the structure of the program of studies. The milieu is considered as technology reshapes our ways of life. In the complexity of the teaching and learning process, again I wondered about the lived curriculum of struggling readers.

This review of the various eras shows the evolution of research on reading over the years. As time goes by, researchers keep trying to understand the intricacies of learning to read. They dissect its layers and use different angles to research it. Yet, I

wondered about how *learning to read is understood* on the research landscape. Reading is still considered an activity that can be directed, controlled, and facilitated considering cognition, instruction, practice, and the milieu. Would understanding *learning to read* differently lead to new insights? How would understanding *learning* next to the child work, with the starting point being the child instead of the mandated curriculum? How could we then understand a child's lived curriculum?

In retrospect, even though eras have come and gone, and approaches, methods, and programs have varied through the years, there is one common element that has remained unchanged: children are expected to learn certain things at specific ages. One example of this is learning to read by the end of Grade 1. Nothing has shifted at that level; the anticipated outcome is still the same. No matter how a child learns, where he/she is from, what is to be read, and why he/she reads, Grade 1 children are expected to learn to read.

**Why write about reading?** In conversation with Jean, she asked me why I felt the need to write about reading. First, I thought it was taken for granted that I would and that I should. She surprised me a little. I knew my topic was not about reading but it was so closely related to it. My topic was about the experiences children have in school when they cannot learn to read as expected; it was about their lived curriculum, not about reading. I wanted to learn how Grade 1 and Grade 2 students live this part of their school journey, in order to share this information with colleagues in the field, and maybe, try to make children's experience of learning to read more educative. Parents of children who toward the end of Grade 1 had not yet learned to read also helped me learn about their children's experiences since they were so close to them. I invited them to share with me

their experiences of parenting a struggling reader. My research topic was not about reading, but why did I need to write about reading?

How can a child succeed in school, at any grade level, if he/she has difficulty reading? Many school activities revolve around reading. The way a teacher plans daily activities has an impact on students. Does the teacher take into consideration the struggling readers? Will children need to read on their own to accomplish tasks? Will children work with a partner? Reading is a required skill for students in school. Not reading is problematic, and this problematic situation was what interested me. How was it lived by each child? By each child's parents? By each child's teacher? Interestingly, when I paused and reflected on how I thought about reading difficulties, I realized that I reacted like the majority of people; I wanted to find a way to help children overcome their difficulties. How could I assist them in moving on with their lives as students? In this research, I wanted to inquire into the experiences of children, parents, and teachers. By doing so, it might help me figure out how to best help them. Here again, upon reflection, I wondered; was this what I really needed to find? Was this what I wanted to find? There will always be students who will learn differently and at another pace. This research was about the experiences of children who did not learn according to the expectations of the mandated curriculum, and in my experience, of society in general. So, why did I want to write about reading?

I have always been interested in how children learn to read. I find it intriguing and fascinating. I started my doctoral studies as a language and literacy student with an interest in how children learn to read. Yet, during that first year, I noticed how my focus was not only on the subject matter. I realized that curriculum studies attracted me more

than an exclusive focus on the subject matter of language and literacy. Recognizing this, I decided to switch programs and focus on curriculum studies. Then again, why write about reading?

Reading helps children succeed in school. When I address the experience of not learning to read, how could I not address reading? The dominant sociocultural and institutional discourses are that reading is essential in order to succeed in school and later in life. When one discusses school success, isn't it logical to think about reading? How do we study and write tests? How do we find information? Reading is indispensable. When reading is difficult, we try to find the reasons why a child is having trouble. "What is wrong with the child?", we often hear. Then follows the inevitable: What can we do to *fix* the problem? I remembered taking a graduate class with fellow teachers. The majority of the students were avid readers. The stigma I perceived in that class around children who did not read much left me perplexed. Pitying looks on faces, comments labelling the non-readers, and assumptions about the *poor* children who would not succeed in life were common occurrences. I felt uneasy about such displays of sympathy. Children who did not live up to the expectations society had for them seemed to be marginalised. This situation brought to my attention the impact educators have on children's lives when children are screened according to their abilities and skills, and in a way, have their future stories decided. Are teachers helping these children succeed, with in their efforts to find what would suit them best as they view them with a *handicap*? Immersed in an environment where reading is associated with success in life, where it is the dominant institutional discourse, wouldn't one be tempted to try to figure out how to help struggling readers and write about reading? I wondered how we could help children

avoid ending up on the *at risk*<sup>131</sup> list. Didn't they need to learn to read? Once they would become readers, they would not be marginalized anymore. They would have the skills to live a decent and fulfilling life and escape the difficulties non-readers encounter in their daily lives. Reflecting more on this showed me how strong the dominant narrative about how children should learn to read in Grade 1 was, and how firmly established it was in our culture. Was this why I needed to write about reading? Despite my intentions, I realized that I was falling into the trap of trying to make all Grade 1 children readers, just as it is stated in the mandated curriculum (Alberta Education, 2000, p. 22). Learning to read *is* important. However, contrary to the institutional and sociocultural narratives, it does not always happen in Grade 1. I wanted to learn about the experiences of children who did not learn to read in Grade 1 because I did not believe there was one best way to teach reading. Many researchers have given us an array of methods and techniques that we can use to accompany young readers. We have many options to consider. While there has been an impressive amount of work and energy devoted to the search for best practices in teaching to read, I wanted to approach the issue from a different angle. Children's perspectives, their telling of what it was like to try to learn to read in school, provided a new outlook on the situation. Along with the parents' and teachers' telling of their experiences with children who struggled to learn to read, I hoped to open a new door into children's school experiences that would make school a learning environment for all children.

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<sup>131</sup> To be "at risk" in this context means to display signs that are believed to be predictors in estimating the risk of future reading difficulties, such as difficulties with letter recognition and deficiencies in phonological awareness (Catts et al, 2001).



Why write about reading? My need to put reading in perspective on the spectrum of children's experiences in school was the reason why I wrote about reading. It helped me see the ramifications the study could have, and it showed me its borders. My study *was not* about reading. However, because school *is* about reading, I needed to stay vigilant and avoid confusing my research topic with the context of my inquiry.

## Appendix B

### Tiny Tim's Story

#### **Tiny Tim's Story**



By Sonia with the help of  
Tiny Tim, Morgan, Jay, Mrs. Taylor, and Mrs. Henry  
Fall 2011

1

#### **Tiny Tim's Voice Grade 1**



I was all done reading for the year. I was the first one in my class to be done. I liked to read Harry Potter, Scooby Doo, and Cat in the Hat.

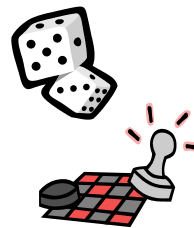
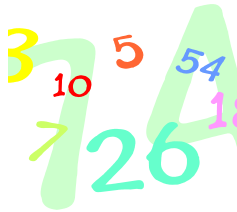
2



I liked Josh. He was my friend, but some kids were mean to me.

Grade 1

3



I liked to do math and play at the centers.

Grade 1

4

## I like Harry Potter.

Small writing gives me headaches.

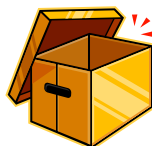


Grade 1

I did not like reading small words,  
only big words. I did not like  
writing. It made my body hurt.



5



**SW1**

One day at my house, I put the easy  
books in a box, put tape on it, and  
wrote SW1, just like at school. Some  
books were very hard to read.



Grade 1

6



# 1000



Grade 1

I thought I had to read chapter books in Grade 2. My big brother Luke was in Grade 3 and he read 1000 pages.

7

## Grade 2



Grade 2

Mrs. Henry was my Grade 2 teacher. I listened to her well. I was happy to have Josh in my class again.

8



Grade 2

I liked to hang out with Sonia and read with her when she was at school. I also liked going upstairs with her. That's where we talked. There were toys in that room.

9



Grade 2

I loved to play and go to the gym.



10

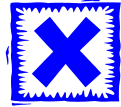
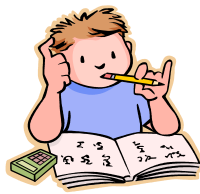


Grade 2

I started to read chapter books.  
I was happy about that.



11



Grade 2

I did not like tests. They were my worst  
enemy!

12



Grade 2

First, I was not happy to have to move. I worried Josh would not make new friends.

13



Grade 2

On my way to the washroom one day, a teenager dunked me in the snow.

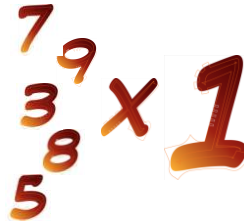
14





Grade 2

I did pretty good in Grade 2. I improved my writing. I knew trees give us oxygen and how boats float. I even knew - anything times one is the same number.



15

## **Mom's Voice and (sometimes) Dad's Voice**

**Grade 1**



Grade 1

Even though Tiny Tim was younger than the other kids, we thought he could do well in Grade 1.

16



Grade 1



Mrs. Taylor gave us phonics books to help Tiny Tim learn his sounds. He did not like to read purple books because they were too long. He liked to read short books with big words.

17



NO



Grade 1

Tiny Tim did not always like to read at home. He said Luke could have the summer reading pack I bought him. He did not want to read them. They were chapter books!

18

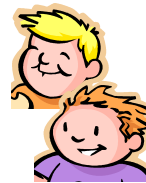


Grade 1

Tiny Tim did well in math. Mrs. Taylor said he did well and read like a Grade 1 should.

19

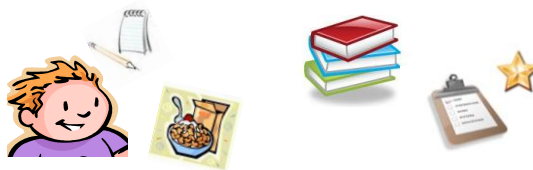
## Grade 2



Grade 2

Tiny Tim was happy to be with Josh. I asked Mrs. Henry to have him sit at the front so he could see well.

20



Grade 2

Tiny Tim practised his spelling words every morning at breakfast. He liked to read a chapter book but he also read easier books to fill out his reading sheet so he could get stickers.

21



Grade 2

Tiny Tim and Luke were nervous about moving. We tried not to talk about it too often but they worried.

22

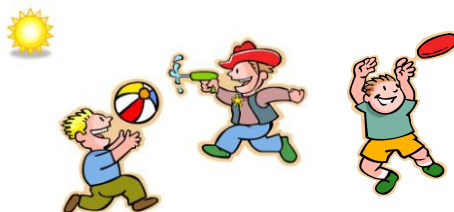


Grade 2

When Tiny Tim had problems with kids, I wanted him to talk to his teacher or the principal about it. He didn't. We told his brother to keep an eye on him at recess.



23



Grade 2

In the spring, I let Tiny Tim play outside. We did not read as much. I'd rather have him play than stay inside and read. He's read a lot this year.

24



Grade 2

I think Tiny Tim progressed a lot in Grade 2. I'm happy with him. I have to remember he is younger. I think he will do well in Grade 3.

25

## Mrs. Taylor's Voice

### Grade 1



Tiny Tim was as cute as a button. He was young. He was born in January.



26



Grade 1

It was not always easy for Tiny Tim in Grade 1 but it was because he was young. Tiny Tim's mom helped in the classroom every week, and she often asked me how she could help him at home. I sent phonics books home so he could practise his sounds.

27



Grade 1

Sometimes reading was hard for Tiny Tim. I wanted to tell his Grade 2 teacher to help him finish his work, and help with his reading and his writing. He still had some catching up to do to be ready for Grade 2.

28



Grade 1

Tiny Tim was intelligent. I believed he would be a very good student by Grade 3. His family helped him and supported him.



29

## **Mrs. Henry's Voice**

### **Grade 2**



Tiny Tim tried hard in Grade 2. Oh, he was a cute little guy.



30





Grade 2

I was surprised with his reading test result.  
He didn't do as well as I expected.

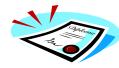
31



Grade 2

I wondered if he was anxious during the test, or  
perhaps, he didn't take time to do his best.  
Maybe he was test shy.

32



Grade 2

I knew Tiny Tim was younger but I didn't think it should matter.

33

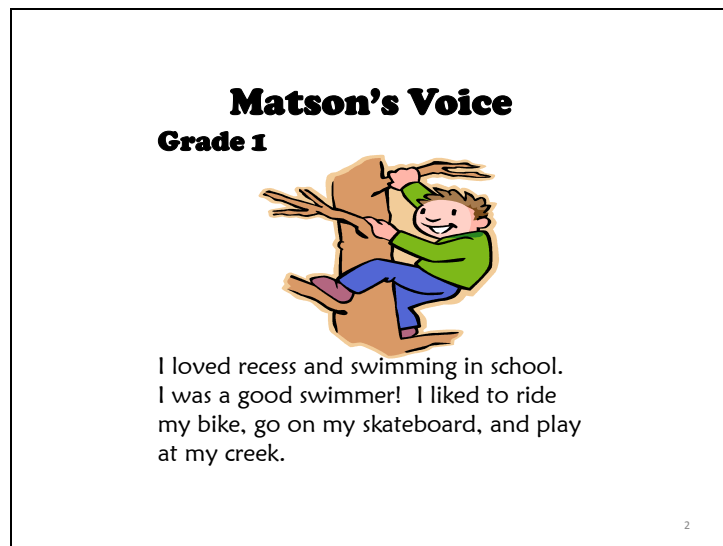
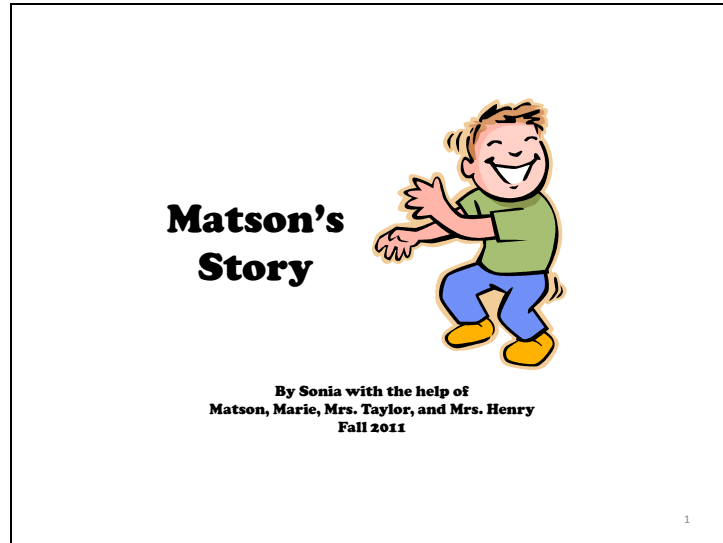


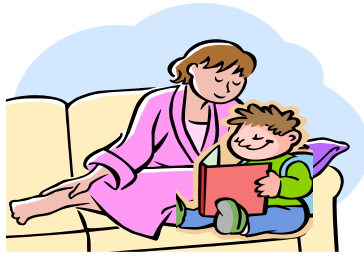
**The End  
(for now)**

34

## Appendix C

### Matson's Story





Grade 1

I read to my mom at home. I found small words easy to read, but big words were difficult sometimes.

3





Grade 1

I didn't want to write because it took me a long time to find ideas. I liked art. I loved to draw.




4


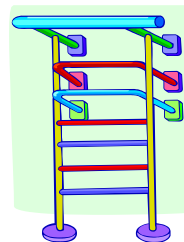



Grade 1


I didn't think I was fast enough in math. I told my mom I was failing, but I was happy when I learned I'd be going into Grade 2. I passed!



5

In Grade 1, gym was what I liked the MOST!



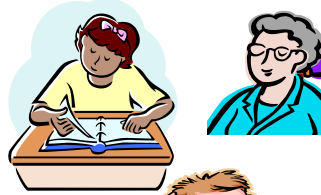
Grade 1

6

## Grade 2



In Grade 2, I was sad because my friend Brent was in another class.



Mrs. Henry was my teacher and she made us be very quiet.

7



Grade 2

I found Grade 2 easier than Grade 1. I did well. I was good at spelling. On my report card, I got a 100% on everything! But Grade 2 was hard for some kids in my class...

8



Grade 2

I liked to make  
my friends laugh.  
Anwar laughed  
even when I  
didn't try to  
be funny!



9

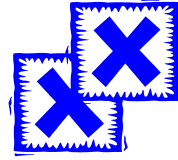


Grade 2

I didn't like to  
read, at school  
or at home. I  
liked spelling,  
but what was  
awesome, was  
recess. I liked  
recess and gym  
the best.



10



Grade 2

In Grade 2, I did good. I didn't get Xs. I found reading easier in Grade 2 than in Grade 1. I worried I'd fail Grade 1 because I got Xs.

11

## Mom's Voice

### Grade 1



I was happy Matson was in Mrs. Taylor's class. I loved her. She taught my two older boys, and I hoped she would be teaching my little Monica.

12





Grade 1

I was surprised in the fall when Mrs. Taylor told me Matson was behind in reading. I had been reading to him and forgot he was supposed to read to me. When we started to have him read to us, he didn't like it at all. He'd say "I don't want to read. I don't want to read". I'd read a page and he'd read a page.



My husband worked with him on reading key words Mrs. Taylor sent home. It took a while but he got going.

13



Grade 1

I was worried when Matson told me he was failing at school. He couldn't tell me why he thought that. I didn't know what to think... Beside from having to catch up with his reading, I didn't think there was anything else he needed to work on.

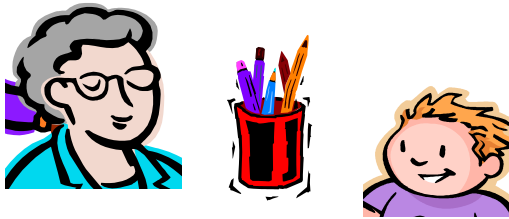


I hoped for a good year in Grade 2. I worried about him getting too much homework. I worried a bit about his reading too. Life was so busy with four children!



14

## Grade 2



Mrs. Henry was Matson's teacher in Grade 2. She was quieter than Mrs. Taylor. Matson seemed to like her.

15



Grade 2

I phoned Mrs. Henry to ask why Matson wasn't bringing books home to read. I found out he had to read his library books. What he liked to do was to read the books Monica brought home and show how good he was at reading.

16



Matson liked school. He was happy. His teacher said he got his work done and tried hard.



Grade 2

I found him more confident. His reading improved from Grade 1.

17



Grade 2

I was surprised to hear Mrs. Henry say Matson was her #1 troublemaker. I asked her what he did. She said he's just mischievous, like nothing bad.



18



Grade 2

After school, Matson would throw his bag in the house and go outside. I let him play. He needed a break. He did his homework later. I didn't worry at all about Matson, I didn't think there were concerns.



19

## Mrs. Taylor's Voice

### Grade 1



I heard Matson was a pretty good little guy. He needed encouragement to do his work, but his kindergarten teacher thought he'd do well. I knew Matson's family because I taught his two brothers, Austin and Bradley. His mom wanted Monica, the little sister, to be in my class as well.



20



Grade 1

In the fall, I told Marie she needed to have Matson read to her. He needed to learn to read on his own. I also sent key words for him to practise.

21



Grade 1

Matson loved to draw. I kept one of his drawings. It was a picture of a big truck. It was amazing!

22



Grade 1

Sometimes, Matson got a little silly. He'd repeat what I'd say. I was concerned about that going into Grade 2. I worried he might not like school if he had to sit and be quiet a lot... but maybe that was what would work for him. I thought he still needed to practise his reading though.



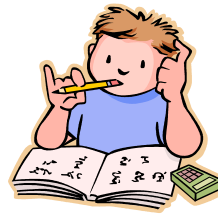
23

## **Mrs. Henry's Voice**

### **Grade 2**



Matson got his work done and did it right away. He had very good work habits.



24



Matson liked the attention. He was silly. I often asked him not to make all kinds of noises in class.



25



Matson did not often bring his library books back and did not fill out the reading sheet. After the first report card, his goal was to work on home reading.



26



Grade 2

Matson did quite well in my class. I thought he would be fine. I saw a bit of trouble with him at the beginning of Grade 2 but I laid the rules clearly. I did not have problems with him.

27



**The End  
(for now)**

28



## Appendix D

### **Information Letters, Consent (and Assent) Forms for Children, Parents, and Teachers.**

#### **Information letter (all parents/caregivers) - Phase 1**

Dear Parent/Caregiver,

My name is Sonia Houle and I am a doctoral student at the University of Alberta. I am conducting a research study for my doctoral dissertation in your child's classroom beginning in May 2009 until the end of June 2009. My study focuses on the experiences young children live as they learn to read in Grade 1. I am interested in hearing from children who learn to read, from their parents who live alongside them, and from their teacher who accompanies them in Grade 1.

I will be a participant observer in your child's classroom, three mornings a week. Through notes, I will record conversations, activities, and experiences related to learning to read. At the beginning of the study, I will allow time to become acquainted with the children and form trusting relationships. Occasionally, I will enter into conversations with the students while I am in the classroom. These conversations will be informal and will not take the form of interviews. As the study progresses, I will have more formal conversations with certain students and their parents, but will ask for their consent first.

Writing based on this inquiry will be submitted for publication in journals and presentations will be made at local, national, and international conferences. Your child's anonymity, as well as the anonymity of others and the school, will be respected. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality.

All of my research request and methods will first be approved by the University of Alberta (Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana, and Campus Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board), by the school district, by the principal of the school, and by the classroom teacher. Participation is voluntary. I would appreciate it if you would sign the attached consent form and return it with your child.

For questions or clarifications, I may be reached at the contact information listed below. You may also contact Dr. Jean Clandinin (research supervisor) at

[jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca](mailto:jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca).

Sincerely,

Sonia Houle  
PhD candidate  
Centre for research for Teacher Education and Development  
University of Alberta

Telephone: 780-492-7770

e-mail: [sonia.houle@ualberta.ca](mailto:sonia.houle@ualberta.ca)

## Informed Consent (all parents/caregivers) - Phase 1

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I give permission for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in the research study entitled, “Children, Teachers, Parents, and Their Stories of School - A narrative inquiry into the lived curriculum of young ‘readers who are not yet’ ”. I understand that this research will be carried out by Sonia Houle, a PhD student from the University of Alberta.

As a parent of a child in Ms./Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ class, I have been informed that Sonia will be a participant observer in my child’s classroom and that she will write field notes of her participation. Sonia will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for Protection of Human Research Participants ([http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/GFCPOLICYMANUAL/content.cfm?ID\\_page=37738](http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/GFCPOLICYMANUAL/content.cfm?ID_page=37738)).

I am aware that writing based on this inquiry will be submitted for publication in journals and that presentations will be made at local, national, and international conferences. I have been informed that my anonymity, as well as the anonymity of others and the school, will be respected. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality.

My child and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and to clarify concerns about this inquiry. I know that my permission for my child’s participation is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw her/him from the research at any time without consequences. In that event, any data relating to my child that has been collected to that point will only be used upon my consent. I feel comfortable in talking with Sonia about this possibility if it should arise.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name Please Print

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*For further information concerning the completion of this form, please contact Jean Clandinin, Sonia’s supervisor at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development, University of Alberta at 780-492-7770.*

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB c/o Ingrid Johnston at 780-492-3751, [ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca](mailto:ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca)

### **Information letter (all children) - Phase 1**

My name is Sonia Houle and I am a student at the University of Alberta. Part of my school work is to do a research project. My project is about children who are learning to read in Grade 1. I want to learn about what it is like for you to learn to read.

I will be coming in your class three mornings a week during the months of May and June 2009. At the beginning, I will take time to get to know you and your classmates. I will probably talk to you, and help you sometimes. I will also talk to your teacher and help her too. I will write notes for myself so I don't forget what I see and hear.

You do not have to talk to me if you don't want to, or if you don't feel like it. If you have any questions, please ask me. I will be happy to answer them for you. I am looking forward to spending time in your class.

Sincerely,

Sonia Houle  
Student/researcher  
University of Alberta

### Assent (all children) - Phase 1

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I agree to participate in the research study entitled “Children, Teachers, Parents, and Their Stories of School - A narrative inquiry into the lived curriculum of young ‘readers who are not yet’”. I understand that this research will be carried out by Sonia Houle, a PhD student from the University of Alberta.

I know that Sonia will be part of the events in my classroom. I know that she will write about what she sees, hears, learns, and wonders about from being in the classroom. I know that she and I might talk about my experiences as a student who is learning to read in Grade 1.

Sonia has talked with me about this research. She has answered my questions. I know that I can stop doing the research at any time and I don’t need to talk if I don’t want to. If I change my mind, all I need to do is tell Sonia.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name Please Print

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*For further information concerning the completion of this form, please contact Jean Clandinin, Sonia’s supervisor at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development, University of Alberta at 780-492-7770.*

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB c/o Ingrid Johnston at 780-492-3751, [ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca](mailto:ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca)

## Information letter (teacher) - Phase 1

My name is Sonia Houle and I am a doctoral student at the University of Alberta. I will conduct a research study for my doctoral dissertation in your classroom beginning in May 2009 until the end of June 2009. My study focuses on the experiences young children live as they learn to read in Grade 1. I am interested in hearing from children who learn to read, from their parents who live alongside them, and from their teacher who accompanies them in Grade 1.

I will be a participant observer in your classroom, three mornings a week. Through notes, I will record conversations, activities, and experiences related to learning to read. At the beginning of the study, I will allow time to become acquainted with the children and form trusting relationships. Occasionally, I will enter into conversations with the students while I am in the classroom. These conversations will be informal and will not take the form of interviews. As the study progresses, I will have more formal conversations with certain students and their parents, but will ask for their consent first.

In addition, I would like to meet with you once a month for one hour to discuss your experiences in helping young children learn to read. As the study progresses, I will identify with your help, two students with whom I will have more formal conversations that will be audio-recorded. I also plan to meet the parents of these two children once a month to hear about their experiences related to their children's experiences in learning to read. These conversations will be audio-recorded.

All of my research request and methods will first be approved by the University of Alberta (Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board), by the school district, and by the principal of the school. Participation is voluntary. For questions or clarifications, I may be reached at the contact information listed below. You may also contact Dr. Jean Clandinin (research supervisor) at [jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca](mailto:jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca).

Sincerely,

Sonia Houle  
PhD candidate  
Centre for research for Teacher Education and Development  
University of Alberta  
Telephone: 780-492-7770  
e-mail: [sonia.houle@ualberta.ca](mailto:sonia.houle@ualberta.ca)

## Informed consent (teacher) - Phase 1

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I agree to participate in the research study entitled “Children, Teachers, Parents, and Their Stories of School - A narrative inquiry into the lived curriculum of young ‘readers who are not yet’ ”. I understand that this research will be carried out by Sonia Houle, a PhD student from the University of Alberta.

I have been informed that Sonia will be a participant observer in my classroom. I have been informed that she will write field notes of her participation and that twice, we will engage in tape-recorded and transcribed research conversations, where together, we will share our observations, reflections on, and understandings of the school experiences of children, parents and me. Sonia will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for Protection of Human Research Participants ([http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/GFCPOLICYMANUAL/content.cfm?ID\\_page=37738](http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/GFCPOLICYMANUAL/content.cfm?ID_page=37738)).

I am aware that writing based on this inquiry will be submitted for publication in journals and that presentations will be made at local, national, and international conferences. I have been informed that my anonymity as well as the anonymity of others and the school will be respected. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and to clarify concerns about this inquiry. I know that my participation is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research at any time without consequences. In that event, any data that has been collected to that point will only be used upon my consent. I feel comfortable in talking with Sonia about this possibility if it should arise.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name Please Print

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*For further information concerning the completion of this form, please contact Jean Clandinin, Sonia’s supervisor at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development, University of Alberta at 780-492-7770.*

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB c/o Ingrid Johnston at 780-492-3751, [ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca](mailto:ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca)

## Information letter (child & parent participants) - Phase 1

Dear Mrs./Ms./ Mr. \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Sonia Houle and I am a doctoral student at the University of Alberta. My study focuses on the experiences young children live as they learn to read in Grade 1. I am interested in hearing from children who learn to read, from their parents who live alongside them, and from their teacher who accompanies them in Grade 1. As you are aware, I have been conducting a research study for my doctoral dissertation in your child's classroom since in May 2009.

I would like to work more closely with your child and with you. Through notes, I will record conversations, activities, and experiences in the classroom related to learning to read. I might photocopy some of your child's school work. I would like to hear about your child's experiences in the context of learning to read, as well as your experiences living alongside your child who is trying to learn to read. I plan to meet with your child, three times, and with you, twice, to hear about your experiences and your child's experiences. These conversations will be audio-recorded. Transcripts of all taped conversations will be reviewed with the participants.

Writing based on this inquiry will be submitted for publication in journals and presentations will be made at local, national, and international conferences. Your anonymity, as well as the anonymity of your child, and the school, will be respected. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality.

Participation is voluntary. You, or your child, have the right to withdraw at any time during the study without penalty. If you withdraw, the data collected from observations, conversations, and other activities will only be used upon your consent. All of my research request and methods will first be approved by the University of Alberta (Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board), your school district, school principal, and the classroom teacher.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Your child's experiences and yours as a parent are important in this research project. I would appreciate it if you would sign the attached consent form and return it with our child. For questions or clarifications, I may be reached at the contact information listed below. You may also contact Dr. Jean Clandinin (research supervisor) at [jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca](mailto:jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca).

Sincerely,

Sonia Houle

PhD candidate

Centre for research for Teacher Education and Development

University of Alberta

Telephone: 780-492-7770

e-mail: [sonia.houle@ualberta.ca](mailto:sonia.houle@ualberta.ca)



## Informed consent form (child participants) - Phase 1

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I give permission for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in the research study entitled, “Children, Teachers, Parents, and Their Stories of School - A narrative inquiry into the lived curriculum of young ‘readers who are not yet’ ”. I understand that this research will be carried out by Sonia Houle, a PhD student from the University of Alberta.

As a parent of a child participant in this study, I have been informed that Sonia will be a participant observer in my child’s classroom. I have been informed that she will write field notes of her participation and that on three occasions, Sonia and my child will engage in tape-recorded and transcribed research conversations, where together, they will share observations, reflections on, and understandings of my child’s experience. I understand that some of my child’s school work may become part of the inquiry. Sonia will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for Protection of Human Research Participants

([http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/GFCPOLICYMANUAL/content.cfm?ID\\_page=37738](http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/GFCPOLICYMANUAL/content.cfm?ID_page=37738)).

I am aware that writing based on this inquiry will be submitted for publication in journals and that presentations will be made at local, national, and international conferences. I have been informed that my anonymity, as well as the anonymity of my child and the school, will be respected. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality.

My child and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and to clarify concerns about this inquiry. I know that my permission for my child’s participation is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw her/him from the research at any time without consequences. In that event, any data relating to my child that has been collected to that point will only be used upon my consent. I feel comfortable in talking with Sonia about this possibility if it should arise.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name Please Print

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*For further information concerning the completion of this form, please contact Jean Clandinin, Sonia’s supervisor at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development, University of Alberta at 780-492-7770.*

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB c/o Ingrid Johnston at 780-492-3751, [ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca](mailto:ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca)

## Informed consent (parent participants) - Phase 1

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I agree to participate in the research study entitled, “Children, Teachers, Parents, and Their Stories of School - A narrative inquiry into the lived curriculum of young ‘readers who are not yet’ ”. I understand that this research will be carried out by Sonia Houle, a PhD student from the University of Alberta.

I have been informed that Sonia will be a participant observer in my child’s classroom. I have been informed that she will write field notes of her participation and that on two occasions, we will engage in tape-recorded and transcribed research conversations, where together, we will share observations, reflections on, and understandings of my experiences as the parent of a Grade 1 child who is learning to read. Sonia will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for Protection of Human Research Participants ([http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/GFCPOLICYMANUAL/content.cfm?ID\\_page=37738](http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/GFCPOLICYMANUAL/content.cfm?ID_page=37738)).

I am aware that writing based on this inquiry will be submitted for publication in journals and that presentations will be made at local, national, and international conferences. I have been informed that my anonymity as well as the anonymity of my child and the school will be respected. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and to clarify concerns about this inquiry. I know that my participation is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research at any time without consequences. In that event, any data that has been collected to that point will only be used upon my consent. I feel comfortable in talking with Sonia about this possibility if it should arise.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name Please Print

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*For further information concerning the completion of this form, please contact Jean Clandinin, Sonia’s supervisor at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development, University of Alberta at 780-492-7770.*

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB c/o Ingrid Johnston at 780-492-3751, [ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca](mailto:ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca)

## **Information letter (child participants) - Phase 1**

You know me already and know that I am a student at the University of Alberta, and that I have to do a research project. I still want to learn more about children who are learning to read in Grade 1. I would like you to tell me more about what it is like to learn to read in Grade 1. I also want to know what it is like for your parents to help you learn to read and I will be talking to them too.

I will keep coming in your class three mornings a week to help. I will keep writing notes for myself so I don't forget what I see and hear. You and I will talk about what it is like to try to learn to read in Grade 1. I will record our conversations and will write about them. I will show you what I write. I might photocopy some of your school work. I will talk to your parents and will record these conversations too.

You do not have to talk to me if you don't want to, or if you don't feel like it. If you have any questions, please ask me. I will be happy to answer them for you. I am looking forward to spending time with you.

Sincerely,

Sonia Houle  
Student/researcher  
University of Alberta

## Assent (child participants) - Phase 1

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I agree to participate in the research study entitled “Children, Teachers, Parents, and Their Stories of School - A narrative inquiry into the lived curriculum of young ‘readers who are not yet’”. I understand that this research will be carried out by Sonia Houle, a PhD student from the University of Alberta.

I know that Sonia will be part of the events in my classroom. I know that she will write about what she sees and hears from being in the classroom. I know that she and I will talk about my experiences as a student who is learning to read in Grade 1. I know that Sonia will record our conversations, will write about them, and when our conversations are typed, we will talk about them. I also know that she might use some of my school work for her research. I know that Sonia will talk to my parents about them helping me learn to read.

I am aware that Sonia will write papers and share with other people what she is learning from our work together. I know that when she writes or talks about me, she will not tell my name or my school’s name.

Sonia has talked with me about this research. She has answered my questions. I know that I can stop doing the research at any time and I don’t need to talk if I don’t want to. If I change my mind, all I need to do is to tell Sonia.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name Please Print

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*For further information concerning the completion of this form, please contact Jean Clandinin, Sonia’s supervisor at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development, University of Alberta at 780-492-7770.*

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB c/o Ingrid Johnston at 780-492-3751, [ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca](mailto:ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca)

## **Information letter (all children) - Phase 2**

My name is Sonia Houle and I am a student at the University of Alberta. Part of my school work is to do a research project. My project is about children who continue to learn to read in Grade 2. I want to learn about what it is like for you to learn to read.

I will be coming in your class three mornings a week until February 2010. At the beginning, I will take time to get to know you and your classmates. I will probably talk to you, and help you sometimes. I will not give you tests. I will also talk to your teacher and help her too. I will write notes for myself so I don't forget what I see and hear.

You do not have to talk to me if you don't want to, or if you don't feel like it, and can stop at any time during the study. I will not use your real name, or the school's real name because my study has to be anonymous (people should not be able to know who you are when they read my paper).

If you have any questions, please ask me. I will be happy to answer them for you. I am looking forward to spending time in your class.

Sincerely,

Sonia Houle  
Student/researcher  
University of Alberta

## Assent (all children) - Phase 2

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I agree to participate in the research study entitled “Children, Teachers, Parents, and Their Stories of School - A narrative inquiry into the lived curriculum of young ‘readers who are not yet – Part 2’”. I understand that this research will be carried out by Sonia Houle, a PhD student from the University of Alberta.

I know that Sonia will be part of the events in my classroom. I know that she will write about what she sees, hears, learns, and wonders about from being in the classroom. I know that she and I might talk about my experiences as a student who is learning to read in Grade 2 and that when she writes about it, she will not use my real name or the real name of the school.

Sonia has talked with me about this research. She has answered my questions. I know that I cannot do the research, or that I can stop doing the research at any time. If I change my mind, all I need to do is tell Sonia, or ask my parents to let her know.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name Please Print

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*For further information concerning the completion of this form, please contact Jean Clandinin, Sonia’s supervisor at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development, University of Alberta at 780-492-7770.*

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB c/o Ingrid Johnston at 780-492-3751, [ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca](mailto:ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca)

## Information letter (Grade 1 teacher) - Phase 2

My name is Sonia Houle and I am a doctoral student at the University of Alberta. I will pursue my research study for my doctoral dissertation in a Grade 2 classroom in your school beginning in September 2009 until February 2010. My study focuses on the experiences young children live as they learn to read in Grade 2. I am interested in hearing from children who learn to read, from their parents who live alongside them, and from their teacher who accompanies them in Grade 2. Since you were the Grade 1 teacher of my two student-participants, I would like to continue having conversations with you about your experiences in helping young children learn to read.

I would like to meet with you twice, for one hour, to continue the conversations with had during the last school year. Together, we will schedule these conversations and choose a location to have them. I will need your email address, your phone number, and your home address (if needed for meetings). This personal information will only be used by me and will be kept in a secure place for five years following completion of the research project after which it will be destroyed in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality. I will audio-record our conversations.

I will have more formal conversations twice a month, with two of your former students who were identified in the pilot study. These conversations will be audio-recorded. I also plan to meet five times with the parents of these two children to hear about their experiences related to their children's experiences in learning to read and four times with the Grade 2 teacher as well. These conversations will be audio-recorded.

All of my research request and methods has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta, by the school district, by the principal of the school, and by the homeroom teacher. You have the right to not participate, and may remove yourself from the study at any time. Your anonymity as well as the anonymity of others and the school will be respected. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality. For questions or clarifications, I may be reached at the contact information listed below. You may also contact Dr. Jean Clandinin (research supervisor) at [jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca](mailto:jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca).

Sincerely,

Sonia Houle  
PhD candidate  
Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development  
University of Alberta  
Telephone: 780-492-7770  
e-mail: [sonia.houle@ualberta.ca](mailto:sonia.houle@ualberta.ca)

## **Informed consent (Grade 1 teacher) - Phase 2**

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I agree to participate in the research study entitled “Children, Teachers, Parents, and Their Stories of School - A narrative inquiry into the lived curriculum of young ‘readers who are not yet – Part 2’ ”. I understand that this research will be carried out by Sonia Houle, a PhD candidate from the University of Alberta.

I have been informed that Sonia will be a participant observer in a Grade 2 classroom. I have been informed that she will write field notes of her participation and that twice, we will engage in one-hour tape-recorded and transcribed research conversations, where together, we will share our observations, reflections on, and understandings of the school experiences of children, parents and me. Sonia will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for Protection of Human Research Participants ([http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/GFCPOLICYMANUAL/content.cfm?ID\\_page=37738](http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/GFCPOLICYMANUAL/content.cfm?ID_page=37738)).

I am aware that writing based on this inquiry will be submitted for publication in journals and that presentations will be made at local, national, and international conferences. I have been informed that my anonymity as well as the anonymity of others and the school will be respected. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and to clarify concerns about this inquiry. I know that I have the right to not participate, and that I can withdraw from the research at any time without consequences. In that event, any data that has been collected to that point will only be used upon my consent. I feel comfortable in talking with Sonia about this possibility if it should arise. I have been provided with two consent form copies; one to be signed and returned to the researcher, and one for me to keep.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name Please Print

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

*For further information concerning the completion of this form, please contact Jean Clandinin, Sonia’s supervisor at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development, University of Alberta at 780-492-7770.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB c/o Ingrid Johnston at 780-492-3751, [ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca](mailto:ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca)



### **Information letter (Grade 2 teacher) - Phase 2**

My name is Sonia Houle and I am a doctoral student at the University of Alberta. I will conduct a research study for my doctoral dissertation in your classroom beginning in September 2009 until February 2010. My study focuses on the experiences young children live as they learn to read in Grade 2. I am interested in hearing from children who learn to read, from their parents who live alongside them, and from their teacher who accompanies them in Grade 2.

I will be a participant observer in your classroom, three mornings a week. Through notes, I will record conversations, activities, and experiences related to learning to read. At the beginning of the study, I will allow time to become acquainted with the children and form trusting relationships. No testing will occur and students' participation in the study will not change their classroom experiences or relationship with you. Occasionally, I will enter into conversations with the students while I am in the classroom. These conversations will be informal and will not take the form of interviews.

In addition, I would like to meet with you four times, for one hour, to discuss your experiences in helping young children learn to read. We will mutually agree on times and locations for our meetings. I will need your email address, your phone number, and your home address (if needed for meetings). This personal information will only be used by me and will be kept in a secure place for five years following completion of the research project after which it will be destroyed in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality. I will audio-record our conversations.

I will have more formal conversations twice a month, with two of your students who were identified in the pilot study. These conversations will be audio-recorded. I also plan to meet five times with the parents of these two children to hear about their experiences related to their children's experiences in learning to read and with their Grade 1 teacher twice. These conversations will be audio-recorded.

All of my research request and methods has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta, by the school district, and by the principal of the school. You have the right to not participate, and may remove yourself from the study at any time. Your anonymity as well as the anonymity of others and the school will be respected. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality. For questions or clarifications, I may be reached at the contact information listed below. You may also contact Dr. Jean Clandinin (research supervisor) at [jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca](mailto:jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca).

Sincerely,

Sonia Houle  
PhD candidate  
Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development  
University of Alberta  
Telephone: 780-492-7770  
e-mail: [sonia.houle@ualberta.ca](mailto:sonia.houle@ualberta.ca)

## Informed consent (Grade 2 teacher) - Phase 2

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I agree to participate in the research study entitled “Children, Teachers, Parents, and Their Stories of School - A narrative inquiry into the lived curriculum of young ‘readers who are not yet – Part 2’ ”. I understand that this research will be carried out by Sonia Houle, a PhD candidate from the University of Alberta.

I have been informed that Sonia will be a participant observer in my classroom. I have been informed that she will write field notes of her participation and that four times, we will engage in tape-recorded and transcribed research conversations, where together, we will share our observations, reflections on, and understandings of the school experiences of children, parents and me. Sonia will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for Protection of Human Research Participants ([http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/GFCPOLICYMANUAL/content.cfm?ID\\_page=37738](http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/GFCPOLICYMANUAL/content.cfm?ID_page=37738)).

I am aware that writing based on this inquiry will be submitted for publication in journals and that presentations will be made at local, national, and international conferences. I have been informed that my anonymity as well as the anonymity of others and the school will be respected. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and to clarify concerns about this inquiry. I know that I have the right to not participate, and that I can withdraw from the research at any time without consequences. In that event, any data that has been collected to that point will only be used upon my consent. I feel comfortable in talking with Sonia about this possibility if it should arise. I have been provided with two consent form copies; one to be signed and returned to the researcher, and one for me to keep.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name Please Print

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*For further information concerning the completion of this form, please contact Jean Clandinin, Sonia’s supervisor at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development, University of Alberta at 780-492-7770.*

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## **Information letter (child & parent/caregiver participants) - Phase 2**

Dear Mrs./Ms./ Mr. \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Sonia Houle and I am a doctoral student at the University of Alberta. My study focuses on the experiences young children live as they continue to learn to read in Grade 2. I am interested in hearing from children who learn to read, from their parents who live alongside them, and from their teacher who accompanies them in Grade 2.

I will continue to work more closely with your child and with you until February 2010. Through notes, I will record conversations, activities, and experiences in the classroom related to learning to read. I might photocopy some of your child's school work. I would like to hear about your child's experiences in the context of learning to read, as well as your experiences living alongside your child who is trying to learn to read. No testing will occur and grading will not be affected. Your child's participation in the study will not change his or her classroom experience or relationship with the teacher. I plan to meet with your child twice a month for 30 minutes, during lunch hour, or at a time Mrs. Henry prefers, in the small room next to the library.

In addition, I plan to meet with you, five times, for one hour, to hear about your experiences and your child's experiences. We will mutually agree on times and locations for our conversations. I will need your email address, your phone number, and your home address (if needed for meetings). This personal information will only be used by me and will be kept in a secure place for five years following completion of the research project after which it will be destroyed in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality. Our conversations will be audio-recorded. Transcripts of all taped conversations will be reviewed with the participants (you).

Writing based on this inquiry will be submitted for publication in journals and presentations will be made at local, national, and international conferences. Your anonymity, as well as the anonymity of your child, and the school, will be respected. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality.

You have the right not to participate. You, or your child, have the right to withdraw at any time during the study without penalty. If you withdraw, the data collected from observations, conversations, and other activities will only be used upon your consent. All of my research request and methods has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta, by the school district, by the principal of the school, and the classroom teacher. For questions or clarifications, I may be reached at the contact information listed below. You may also contact Dr. Jean Clandinin (research supervisor) at [jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca](mailto:jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca).

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Your child's experiences and yours as a parent are important in this research project. I would appreciate it if you would sign the attached consent form and return it with our child.

Sincerely,

Sonia Houle

PhD candidate

Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development, University of Alberta

Telephone: 780-492-7770

e-mail: [sonia.houle@ualberta.ca](mailto:sonia.houle@ualberta.ca)

## Informed consent (for child participants) - Phase 2

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I give permission for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in the research study entitled, “Children, Teachers, Parents, and Their Stories of School - A narrative inquiry into the lived curriculum of young ‘readers who are not yet – Part 2’ ”. I understand that this research will be carried out by Sonia Houle, a PhD student from the University of Alberta.

As a parent of a child participant in this study, I have been informed that Sonia will be a participant observer in my child’s classroom. I have been informed that she will write field notes of her participation and that on twelve occasions, Sonia and my child will engage in 30 minute tape-recorded and transcribed research conversations, where together, they will share observations, reflections on, and understandings of my child’s experiences. I understand that some of my child’s school work may become part of the inquiry. Sonia will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for Protection of Human Research Participants

([http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/GFCPOLICYMANUAL/content.cfm?ID\\_page=37738](http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/GFCPOLICYMANUAL/content.cfm?ID_page=37738)).

I am aware that writing based on this inquiry will be submitted for publication in journals and that presentations will be made at local, national, and international conferences. I have been informed that my anonymity, as well as the anonymity of my child and the school, will be respected. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality. In all reports related to this study, neither my child’s name nor any identifying information will be used.

My child and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and to clarify concerns about this inquiry. I know that my permission for my child’s participation is voluntary, that we have the right not to participate, and that I can withdraw her/him from the research at any time without consequences. In that event, any data relating to my child that has been collected to that point will only be used upon my consent. I feel comfortable in talking with Sonia about this possibility if it should arise. I have been provided with two consent form copies; one to be signed and returned to the researcher, and one for me to keep.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name Please Print

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

*For further information concerning the completion of this form, please contact Jean Clandinin, Sonia’s supervisor at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development, University of Alberta at 780-492-7770.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB c/o Ingrid Johnston at 780-492-3751, [ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca](mailto:ingrid.johnston@ualberta.ca)

## **Informed consent (parent participants) - Phase 2**

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I agree to participate in the research study entitled, “Children, Teachers, Parents, and Their Stories of School - A narrative inquiry into the lived curriculum of young ‘readers who are not yet – Part 2’ ”. I understand that this research will be carried out by Sonia Houle, a PhD student from the University of Alberta.

I have been informed that Sonia will be a participant observer in my child’s classroom. I have been informed that she will write field notes of her participation and that on five occasions, we will engage in one hour tape-recorded and transcribed research conversations, where together, we will share observations, reflections on, and understandings of my experiences as the parent of a Grade 2 child who is learning to read. Sonia will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for Protection of Human Research Participants ([http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/GFCPOLICYMANUAL/content.cfm?ID\\_page=37738](http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/GFCPOLICYMANUAL/content.cfm?ID_page=37738)).

I am aware that writing based on this inquiry will be submitted for publication in journals and that presentations will be made at local, national, and international conferences. I have been informed that my anonymity as well as the anonymity of my child and the school will be respected. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and to clarify concerns about this inquiry. I know that my participation is voluntary, that I have the right not to participate, and that I can withdraw from the research at any time without consequences. In that event, any data that has been collected to that point will only be used upon my consent. I feel comfortable in talking with Sonia about this possibility if it should arise. I have been provided with two consent form copies; one to be signed and returned to the researcher, and one for me to keep.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name Please Print

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*For further information concerning the completion of this form, please contact Jean Clandinin, Sonia’s supervisor at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development, University of Alberta at 780-492-7770.*

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## **Information letter (child participants) - Phase 2**

You know me already and know that I am a student at the University of Alberta, and that I have to do a research project. I still want to learn more about children who continue to learn to read in Grade 2. I would like you to tell me more about what it is like to learn to read in Grade 2. I also want to know what it is like for your parents to help you learn to read and I will be talking to them too.

I will be coming in your class three mornings a week to help. I will write notes for myself so I don't forget what I see and hear. You and I will meet every two weeks to talk about what it is like to learn to read in Grade 2. We might play some games, I might ask you to draw something, or I might read you a book for example. I will not give you tests. I will record our conversations and will write about them. I will show you what I write. I might photocopy some of your school work. I will talk to your parents and will record these conversations too.

You can not do the research with me if you don't want to or stop at any time after we start. I will not use your real name or the school's real name in my writing.

If you have any questions, please ask me. I will be happy to answer them for you. I am looking forward to spending time with you.

Sincerely,

Sonia Houle  
Student/researcher  
University of Alberta

## Assent (child participants) - Phase 2

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I agree to participate in the research study entitled “Children, Teachers, Parents, and Their Stories of School - A narrative inquiry into the lived curriculum of young ‘readers who are not yet – Part 2’”. I understand that this research will be carried out by Sonia Houle, a PhD student from the University of Alberta.

I know that Sonia will be part of the events in my classroom. I know that she will write about what she sees and hears from being in the classroom. I know that she and I will talk about my experiences as a student who is learning to read in Grade 2. I know that Sonia will record our conversations, will write about them, and when our conversations are typed, we will talk about them. I also know that she might use some of my school work for her research. I know that Sonia will talk to my parents about them helping me learn to read.

I am aware that Sonia will write papers and share with other people what she is learning from our work together. I know that when she writes or talks about me, she will not tell my real name or my school’s real name.

Sonia has talked with me about this research. She has answered my questions. I know that I cannot do the research, or stop doing it at any time. If I change my mind, all I need to do is to tell Sonia, or ask my parents to let her know.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name Please Print

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*For further information concerning the completion of this form, please contact Jean Clandinin, Sonia’s supervisor at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development, University of Alberta at 780-492-7770.*

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